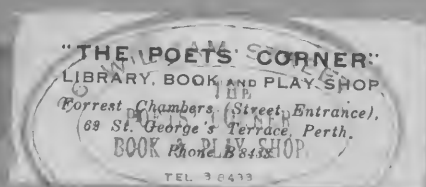


French's Acting Edition. No. 521

A. E. GORDON
A PRESENT
FROM MARGATE

A Frivolous Comedy in Three Acts

By
IAN HAY
and
A. E. W. MASON



LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.
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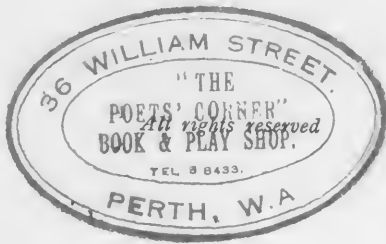
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A PRESENT FROM MARGATE

Produced at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, on Thursday, December 14th, 1933, with the following cast of characters :

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------------------|
| JOAN BUCKLAND | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Joan White.</i> |
| EAVES | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Jack Knight.</i> |
| MAJOR CHEPSTOW | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Eric Maturin.</i> |
| FREDDIE CAREW | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Reginald Gardiner.</i> |
| SAM WALKINSHAW | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Frederick Burtwell.</i> |
| A BATHING GENTLEMAN | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Peter Mather.</i> |
| A BATHING LADY | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Molly Shannon.</i> |
| ROSE TORRENT | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Marda Vanne.</i> |
| JOHN TORRENT | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Frank Pettingell.</i> |
| LADY CHARLOTTE TEIGNMOUTH | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Ivy des Vœux.</i> |
| THE DUCHESS OF RYE | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Joyce Bland.</i> |
| GENERAL MAYNARD | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Ernest Mainwaring.</i> |
| LADY MAYNARD | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Ruth Taylor.</i> |
| A PHOTOGRAPHER | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Roger Maxwell.</i> |
| ERIC RICHMOND | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Michael Shepley.</i> |
| CHARLES | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Alban Blakelock.</i> |
| THOMAS | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Noel Dryden.</i> |
| A MAID | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | <i>Ann Vosper.</i> |

The Play produced by ATHOLE STEWART.

SCENES

ACT I

Interior of a Bathing Pavilion in the South of France.

ACT II

The Duchess's House, Grosvenor Square.

ACT III

SCENE 1.—The Duchess's House, Grosvenor Square.

SCENE 2.—Outside a Window.

SCENE 3.—Mrs. Torrent's House, Grosvenor Square.

A PRESENT FROM MARGATE

ACT I

SCENE.—*The interior of a Bathing Pavilion at Antibes, in the South of France.*

The whole of the back should have the appearance of glass, but this is not essential so long as there are three openings giving easy access to the verandah.

Inside the pavilion are tables and chairs, forming two distinct and separate groups. Door L. into bar. On the verandah outside are three couches, or plain camp bedsteads of canvas, shaded by big umbrellas.

(See Ground Plan of Scene.)

On the C. couch a BATHING LADY is lying flat on her face, on an orange mattress. Her back is quite bare, and she wears purple shorts.

In the long chair R.C., with her feet towards the audience, lies JOAN BUCKLAND, the Duchess of Rye's Secretary. She lies flat on her back, reading. She wears white duck trousers, a blue-and-white striped vest, and a U.S.A. sailor's white cap. She has large smoked-glass spectacles on.

Enter from R. of verandah, EAVES, a rather sleek and oily manservant. He is carrying the usual mattress, two towels, and some illustrated papers. He lays the mattress on the couch R. of the verandah.

JOAN (*sitting up and taking off her spectacles*). I'm afraid you can't put those things there: that place is reserved for the Duchess of Rye.

EAVES (*coming down R.*). I was instructed to lay them out here, madam, by Major Chepstow.

JOAN. Well, you are instructed by me to pick them up again. Major Chepstow is not one of her Grace's party.

EAVES. Very good, madam.

(JOAN rolls back into position, and continues reading. EAVES picks up the mattress and takes it to C. of verandah.)

BATHING LADY (*without turning*). Go away!

(EAVES bows respectfully, and goes to couch L. of verandah, where he lays out the mattress, etc.)

(Enter L., from bar, MAJOR CHEPSTOW, a good-looking, rather flashy person of about forty. He wears a bathing-suit and dressing-gown.)

CHEPSTOW (*seeing EAVES*). Eaves!

EAVES (*coming to opening L.*). Sir?

CHEPSTOW. Where have you put it?

EAVES (*pointing*). There, sir.

CHEPSTOW (*angrily*). That isn't where I told you to put it, you fool.

EAVES. It was the best position I could obtain, sir.

CHEPSTOW. All right. Clear out!

(*EAVES exits R.* CHEPSTOW *goes out to verandah, looks at the BATHING LADY, then comes in again.*)

(*Heartily.*) Good morning, Miss Buckland.

JOAN (*taking off glasses, but without getting up, coldly*). Good morning.

CHEPSTOW. How's the Duchess?

JOAN. I haven't the faintest idea.

CHEPSTOW. I suppose she'll be getting up late to-day. I know she didn't leave the Casino till nearly four. (*Rather proudly.*) She and I were running a bank together, and a very nice little bank, too! Wasn't that wonderful?

JOAN. No.

CHEPSTOW. Why not?

JOAN (*sweetly*). When the Duchess gets worked up, she'll run a bank with almost anybody. (*Puts on glasses again, and goes on reading.*)

CHEPSTOW (*staring at her*). You're being rather a rude little girl, aren't you?

JOAN. If I'm not, I'm wasting a lot of time.

CHEPSTOW (*forcing a laugh*). Well, I never get angry with little girls—or big girls, either! I don't find it necessary. (*Sits R. of her on chair.*) Now, let's talk business. Will you and your little lot come out in my speed-boat this afternoon? We might do a bit of aquaplaning. Do you aquaplane?

JOAN. No.

CHEPSTOW. Well, I'm pretty good. I invite you, Lady Charlotte, and the Maynards. And the Duchess, of course. Ask her for me, there's a good girl.

JOAN. Certainly, if you wish it.

CHEPSTOW. Right. You're a real friend. (*Rising and going L.*) I'll go and give orders about the boat.

JOAN (*taking off her spectacles*). By the way, what's your name?

CHEPSTOW (*glares at her for a moment, then smiles*). Chepstow—and don't you forget it! No little girl ever forgets it!

(*He goes off L. of verandah.* JOAN *lies back with a smile, and a contented sigh.*)

(*At this moment FREDDIE CAREW, an immaculate young man in*

flannels, enters R. of verandah. He comes through opening c., and looks round.)

JOAN. Freddie!

FREDDIE. Joan!

JOAN. Angel! *(She rises and jumps into his arms, kicking her heels in the air. They do not kiss.)* When did you get here? Where are you staying? How are you?

FREDDIE. I got here at breakfast-time. I'm not staying anywhere until I know where you are staying.

JOAN. I'm staying at the Miramar, with Imogen.

FREDDIE. Then so am I!

(JOAN lies down again.)

JOAN. How is London?

FREDDIE. London is full of people pretending they're not there because it's August.

JOAN. And if you catch them, they're just passing through?

FREDDIE *(nodding)*. From Victoria to King's Cross. It takes them about a month, as a rule. *(He strolls on to verandah, then turns.)* How is Antibes? Is it as empty as one has been led to expect?

JOAN. Empty? It's packed. What do you mean?

FREDDIE *(looking down on BATHING LADY'S back)*. Well, is anything going on here? According to our popular press, there are only two people here—Imogen and Mrs. John Torrent. *(He comes in again through c. opening, and sits at table R.)*

JOAN. That's roughly true. The place is divided between Us—which really means Imogen—and the—the—

FREDDIE. Untouchables?

JOAN. Yes—headed by the Torrent woman.

FREDDIE. Do you know her?

JOAN. Well enough to say "Banco!" to, in a loud, rude voice.

FREDDIE. What's she like?

JOAN. To be humiliatingly honest, she looks rather a good sort.

FREDDIE. Is there a Mr. John Torrent?

JOAN. There is, and he's here with her. Her husband! Isn't that dramatic?

FREDDIE. You mean they're living together—in open matrimony?

JOAN. Definitely.

FREDDIE. What a world! I suppose he's rich?

JOAN. Three millions.

FREDDIE. Pounds, dollars, piastres, or kopeks?

JOAN. Pounds, dearie. Bradford—blankets—War contracts! You should see her pearls! He bought the Flamborough Pearls for her last year, when the Flamboroughs were sold up, poor things.

FREDDIE. Did he, though? That'll do her a bit of no good. The Flamborough Pearls have always brought trouble.

JOAN. Still, darling, though of course I only love you, John Torrent is my idea of a husband.

FREDDIE. What's Mr. John Torrent like, apart from his natural functions as an outsize pearl oyster?

JOAN. Quite presentable. A strong silent man from the North. She's got a brother, though, who is the last word—something called Sam. Sam Walkinshaw, the life of every party. He carries false moustaches in his pocket, and gives imitations without being asked.

FREDDIE. In short, the Mediterranean Menace. Describe him, that I may avoid him.

JOAN. Too late, darling! Here he is.

(Enter, from bar L., SAM WALKINSHAW, in dressing-gown and beret. He bows low.)

SAM. Good morning, gentles all!

FREDDIE. Does one know you?

SAM. Everybody knows Sam Walkinshaw; and if they don't know him they know his little sister Rosie.

JOAN. Rosie?

SAM. Rosie Torrent. Mrs. John Torrent. *The* Mrs. John Torrent! Now, what about some fun and games? Have you got a fish about you, brother?

FREDDIE. Fish?

SAM. Yes; to throw to that old walrus down there on the raft—him in the pink and white stripes. (*Goes to verandah, and looks down.*) Have you seen him?

FREDDIE (*without moving*). No.

SAM. Then I'll show you. (*He brings a false moustache out of his pocket, and is about to put it on, when he notices the BATHING LADY.*) Why, if it isn't our old school teacher, Miss Purplestern! (*He slaps her on the back: she turns over and glares.*) Watch this, girlie: it's going to be good. (*He puts on a large walrus moustache.*) Walrus defending its young! (*He enters through L. opening and waddles to FREDDIE and JOAN. They stare at him woodenly.*) No? Well—Walrus defending some one else's young! (*He waddles back to L. opening, and turns.*) No? That's funny: it went all right in the bar just now. I'll try 'em down on the raft. (*He turns and cannons into a BATHING GENTLEMAN, who enters solemnly L. of verandah.*) What are you laughing at?

(*He exits L. of verandah.*)

BATHING GENTLEMAN. Are you ready, darling?

BATHING LADY. What's the water like? (*She rises and moves L., adjusting her straps, etc.*)

BATHING GENTLEMAN. Quite too delicious. Aren't you coming?

BATHING LADY. I'm going to put on a bathing-suit first, idiot!

BATHING GENTLEMAN. But that one looks divine.

BATHING LADY. I'm keeping it for lunch. Don't be a chump!

BATHING GENTLEMAN. No, darling.

(BATHING LADY *disappears* L. BATHING GENTLEMAN *follows*.)

FREDDIE. What were those? (*He rises, goes to c., and looks off* L.)

JOAN. I've forgotten the scientific name. They just crawl out of the water and cling to the rocks.

FREDDIE (*looking after the BATHING LADY*). Of course I only love you, darling, but the Purplestern really is quite strokable.

JOAN. Then go and stroke her, my precious. (*She rises and goes* L.)

FREDDIE. No, no. There is a time for everything. How is Imogen?

JOAN. Imogen. She's just herself, bless her! She looks wonderful, and everybody raves about her, and the Untouchables scabble round the foot of her pedestal; but she never steps down. (*She sits at table* L., *and takes cigarette which* FREDDIE *offers her*.) Talking of pedestals and monumental masonry generally, Eric Richmond is off to Egypt again, to dig up some more mummies. That's why he's here—to say good-bye to Imogen.

FREDDIE. Eric's life-story appears to be one long coroner's inquest, interrupted by farewells to Imogen. Why on earth can't the man ask her to marry him, then we can *all* go to sleep?

JOAN. Well, you know what Eric is—one of those dear dumb Englishmen, full of suppressed yearnings and manly scruples.

FREDDIE. What scruples?

JOAN. Freddie darling! Imogen has only been a widow for eighteen months.

FREDDIE. Isn't that long enough?

JOAN. It would be seventeen moons too long for me! But Imogen is a Duchess.

FREDDIE. And Duchesses have to digest for two years before being offered a second helping. Is that it?

JOAN. No. It's the pedestal. It's a very high pedestal, you know. It frightens Eric.

FREDDIE. Well, if I saw anything on a pedestal that I wanted as badly as Eric wants Imogen, do you know what I'd do? I'd push the pedestal over, and catch her as she fell.

JOAN. My dear, Eric would as soon think of pushing over the Albert Memorial.

FREDDIE. Well, why not? (*He sits at table* L. *by* JOAN.) Joan, shall I tell you what I think? I think we all respect Imogen, and her pedestal, a lot too much. Does it ever occur to you that she must get tired of this touch-me-not business sometimes? I believe that if the right person came along and gave her a good friendly smack on the right spot, she'd adore it. What do you think?

JOAN. It would depend on how hard he smacked her, I should think. (*Hurriedly*.) Look out—enemy in sight!

(Enter CHEPSTOW, L. of verandah. He comes through c. opening.)

FREDDIE. Who?

JOAN. The name is Chepstow. Freeze him!

FREDDIE. Righto!

(CHEPSTOW comes down.)

CHEPSTOW (*jovially*). Well, here we are again. (*Noticing FREDDIE.*) Hallo, a new arrival! Won't you introduce me?

JOAN. Mr. Carew—

FREDDIE (*distantly*). How do you do?

JOAN. Major—Steptoe.

CHEPSTOW. Chepstow!

FREDDIE (*politely—rising*). Quite. Joan, we must go and change.

JOAN (*rising*). Righto.

(JOAN and FREDDIE go R.)

CHEPSTOW. You won't forget to give my invitation to the Duchess, will you?

JOAN. Of course not. What was it?

CHEPSTOW (*impatiently*). Don't worry. I'll ask her myself.

JOAN. I wouldn't wait about if I were you. She may not be down at all to-day. May she, Freddie?

FREDDIE. Or to-morrow.

CHEPSTOW (*undefeated*). Never mind: I'm in no hurry.

(Exit JOAN, R. of verandah.)

FREDDIE. Oh, well—God be with us till we part again!

(Exit after JOAN.)

(EAVES has appeared up R.)

EAVES. Shall I place your mattress over here again, sir? (*Indicating DUCHESS'S couch R.*)

CHEPSTOW. Yes—and get a move on!

(EAVES moves the mattress, then exits up R.)

(Enter, R. of verandah, SAM, now in flannels and carrying a mattress on his shoulder.)

SAM. Ah, the gallant major! Good morrow, fair sir!

(He crosses to L. of verandah and lays mattress on L. couch. Enter, following SAM, ROSE TORRENT. ROSE is in bathing-dress and robe. She is a big, handsome young woman in her early thirties, a naturally good-tempered person whom social ambition has rendered a little hard and calculating.)

CHEPSTOW. Good morning, Rose!

ROSE. Morning, Chepstow! I want you.

SAM (*entering c.*). Have you got a fish about you, brother?

CHEPSTOW. Fish?

SAM. Yes. I want to throw it to that old walrus down on the raft. (*Pointing.*) Do you pipe him?

CHEPSTOW. No. (*He turns away.*)

SAM. Then I'll show you. (*He produces the moustache again.*)
Ladies and gentlemen—

ROSE. Sam, go away. (*She goes up L.*)

SAM. Go away? Me?

ROSE. Yes—and keep away, like a nice brother. (*She picks up the mattress from L. couch and gives it him.*) I've got a delicate job of work to do this morning, and the sight of you might ruin everything.

SAM. But—

ROSE. Buzz off!

(*She bustles SAM off L. into the bar, protesting. ROSE and CHEPSTOW sit at table L.*)

Now listen to me, Chepstow. You've got to introduce me to the Duchess this very morning. You ought to know her well enough by this time. I saw you and she last night—

CHEPSTOW. Her, dear.

ROSE. Both of you—at the big table, running a bank together—and a duck of a bank it was, too! You will introduce me to her as soon as she comes down here.

CHEPSTOW. Why?

ROSE. Why not?

CHEPSTOW. Do you imagine I make the acquaintance of people like her just for the fun of introducing them to people like you?

ROSE. So that's the line of talk, is it? And I seem to remember, not so many years ago, when you used to be very pleased to be taken notice of by a Troop Sergeant-Major's daughter called Rose Walkinshaw.

CHEPSTOW. Yes. And that same Rose Walkinshaw married a millionaire from Bradford! So why shouldn't I have a shot at a Duchess—eh?

ROSE. My dear boy, you can shoot all day long, and good luck to you! But you aren't the only one who's taken out a licence, you know. Come on, Chepstow, don't be a dog in the manger. What are you afraid of? Do you think if I get to know her I'll tell her things about you? Is that it?

CHEPSTOW. What could you tell her about me?

ROSE. Well, I've known you for fifteen years—and I can tell things about most people after fifteen minutes. You're not a bad sort—just a first-class humbug and a howling snob. Otherwise, I rather like you—really I do.

CHEPSTOW. Thank you.

(Enter CHEPSTOW, L. of verandah. He comes through c. opening.)

FREDDIE. Who?

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FREDDIE. Righto!

(CHEPSTOW comes down.)

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CHEPSTOW. Thank you.

ROSE. Now I'll tell you why I want to meet the Duchess. Next season I'm going to break into Society. John has just bought me a big house in a good spot. I'm going to entertain: I'm going to entertain all London. And who do you think my star guest is going to be? The Duchess of Rye. She doesn't know it yet, but she's going to be.

CHEPSTOW. Rose, every ambitious woman in London has tried to get the Duchess of Rye, and every one has failed.

ROSE. I know. That's why I'm going after her—and I won't fail. I'm one of those people who always get what they want in the end. Anyhow, you'll introduce me, and leave the rest to me. And the first time she comes to one of my London parties, my lad, I'll send you a ticket.

CHEPSTOW. Thank you—for nothing! Well, I must have a dip. *(He rises, goes up R., and gets his mattress.)* Are you coming?

ROSE. I don't budge from this spot until my Duchess comes on to that verandah; and when she does, you walk straight out of the water and introduce me!

CHEPSTOW. Do I?

ROSE. Yes. You'll never get five minutes alone with her again until you do. Are we on?

CHEPSTOW. No damn fear!

(He exits, L. of verandah.)

ROSE. We're on!

(She lies down comfortably on the long chair L.C., stretching luxuriously.)

JOHN TORRENT enters, R. of verandah. *He is a decent, practical business man, without any polish about him.)*

TORRENT. Cover yourself up a bit more, dear.

ROSE. Who's that making a noise like a husband? *(She turns round and looks up.)* Well, if it isn't my old pot and pan! *(Noticing that TORRENT is wearing a beret, rather small for him, she sings:)* Where did you get that hat?

TORRENT. You know very well where I got it. You bought it, and made me wear it. I feel that soft in it! I don't know why people can't be allowed to dress like Christians, even in a place like this.

ROSE. Don't be fractious. Come and sit down. *(He sits L. of her. She kisses him on the cheek.)* Now, old gentleman, you and me are going to discuss some plans. *(He growls faintly.)* Why the Dialling Tone?

TORRENT. What were you talking to that flashy chap Chepstow for?

ROSE. He's part of the plan. He is the only man here that I know who knows the Duchess of Rye.

TORRENT. Is she part of the plan too?

ROSE. She's the whole of it. I'm going to make Chepstow introduce me.

TORRENT. Rosie, when will you learn sense? Supposing you do get introduced to her, do you know what she'll do to you?

ROSE (*good-humouredly*). All right, I'll buy it. What will she do?

TORRENT. She'll only make use of you. That's all these people want from the likes of us—free food, free drinks, and cheques for charity. Yes—a charity that begins at home, and is not puffed up! (*He takes up an English weekly magazine, which is lying open, and points to a picture.*) Look! (*Reads.*) “Mrs. Joseph Applegarth's Party for The Twelfth.” I knew Joe Applegarth twenty years ago, when he was running a shoddy mill at Huddersfield. He married a dentist's daughter, from Dewsbury. That's her, in the middle, with Poppy, Duchess of Ickenham, on one side of her, and a Dago Count on the other.

ROSE. But that's not the sort of Duchess I'm after, John. (*Contemptuously.*) Poppy, Duchess of Ickenham! She's no more a Duchess than I am. She was once, but the Duke divorced her. Then she married the chauffeur—and about time, too! The chauffeur's name was Briggs, or something like that. He got fed up with her and left her, so she divorced him. But is she still Mrs. Briggs? Not on your life! She's the Duchess of Ickenham again—with a Poppy in front now! Such fun for the Duke and his new wife! (*Glancing at the paper again.*) “Reading from left to right—the Honourable Bobo Benkard, the well-known mimic.” Mimic! You've seen our Sam do imitations? Well, compared with Bobo Benkard Sam's *good*! Hallo! Here's a poor little man in the back row who hasn't got a name at all—just a blank. I wonder who he is?

TORRENT (*looking over her shoulder*). That's Joe Applegarth. And that's what you're out for, Rose—to take a big house, fill it with spongers, get photographed in a group, stand me up in the back row, and call me Blank!

ROSE. Now listen to me, John. You're making the same mistake about this crowd that nearly everybody makes about them. You think they stand for something—for Society, for England. They don't stand for anything at all: you'd never have heard of most of them if it hadn't been for their Press Agents. (*Indicating the photograph.*) There's another side to this picture. There's the real Society of England—the great families—who keep themselves to themselves, and choose their own friends, and pay for their own meals. They wouldn't be seen dead at a dog-fight with this Reading-from-Left-to-Right lot. They're the sort I'm after. The Duchess of Rye is one of them—one of the biggest of them. She's the daughter of a Duke, and she married a Duke—both of them the kind of Duke that lives on his estate and looks after his tenants, and runs dull, useful things like the Territorials and the County Hospital. There's not so many of that sort as there were, what with super-tax and death duties, but for me they still stand at the

head of everything that's old, and strong, and decent in England. There! (*She rises and goes c.*) When I bust into Society, that's the Society I'm going to bust into! (*TORRENT shakes his head.*) Now what's the matter?

TORRENT. It can't be done.

ROSE. What can't be done?

TORRENT. Two things at once. You're trying to be smart and you're trying to be respectable at the same time, and it's impossible.

ROSE. Wait till you see my Duchess.

TORRENT. All right. When do you start going after her?

ROSE. Start? I've started. Has it escaped your notice that we've just bought a new house in Grosvenor Square?

TORRENT. It has not. I paid for it three days ago!

ROSE. The Duchess of Rye lives next door.

TORRENT. Oh!

ROSE. You didn't know that?

TORRENT. I hadn't realized it. Well, what are you going to do? Dig through the wall?

ROSE. If necessary; but I'm going to try other ways first.

TORRENT. What ways?

ROSE. I don't know; but I do know this. Before next season is out the Duchess of Rye is coming to one of my parties. When she does, London belongs to me.

TORRENT. You'll never get her.

ROSE. What'll you bet?

TORRENT. I don't see how you can bet. What can you pay in if you lose? Have you got an answer to that?

ROSE. Of course I have.

TORRENT. I thought you would. Well?

ROSE (*going L. of him*). You know she tries to carry on with all her late old man's good works, and he was full of them. Will you give me a free hand to subscribe to the lot?

TORRENT. How long for?

ROSE. A year. If I get her inside my house within that time, I've won, and you've got to come into Society with me—real Society—for as long as I want to stay there.

TORRENT. And if you fail?

ROSE. We'll go back to Bradford, and we'll have that baby you talk so much about! Are you on?

TORRENT. Rose, you're a caution!

ROSE. Are we on?

TORRENT. I'm on.

ROSE. Duckie!

(*She kisses him. Voices are heard on the terrace above.*)

TORRENT (*jumping up*). I'm off. Here's the whole circus. (*He turns L.*) Can I get out this way?

ROSE. Yes. Go through the bar.

(TORRENT goes L. to door of bar, then turns.)

TORRENT. Rose, you're a caution!

ROSE. Get along with you!

(Exit TORRENT. ROSE turns, and notices that SAM has entered, L. of verandah, and is getting ready with moustache, etc., to give an imitation for the DUCHESS and her party.)

No you don't, my lad! Come on!

(She hustles SAM off down L., protesting as usual: "But Sis, have a heart!" etc.)

(Enter, in the following order, from L. of verandah: FREDDIE, THE DUCHESS, CHARLOTTE, JOAN, GENERAL and LADY MAYNARD, ERIC. The DUCHESS (IMOGEN) is a beautiful and distinguished-looking woman in her early thirties. Her manner is gracious, but she is distinctly a personage. Nobody, with the occasional exception of her cousin FREDDIE, attempts any modern familiarities of speech with her. Her chief characteristics are quiet dignity in public, and a sort of plaintive wistfulness in private. GENERAL MAYNARD is a rather breezy old gentleman, who is obviously enjoying the spectacle of the lady bathers. His wife, a pleasant, tolerant person, keeps an eye on him and makes him behave, especially when he is in the DUCHESS's presence. CHARLOTTE TEIGNMOUTH is a smart but thoroughly sycophantic young woman, a typical satellite of the DUCHESS. ERIC RICHMOND is a large sunburned, solemn, rather sentimental bachelor, obviously out of his element in his present surroundings. He wears a French fisherman's blue canvas trousers, striped jersey, and American sailor's white hat.

JOAN, FREDDIE, CHARLOTTE and the GENERAL are in bathing-costumes, with the usual wraps. All are chattering. All enter by C. opening, except ERIC, who sits on R. couch in verandah, smoking.)

FREDDIE. It's all right; nobody's pinched our places.

JOAN. I should hope not.

CHARLOTTE (to IMOGEN). Let me take your parasol, darling, and put it down for you.

IMOGEN. It's quite all right, thank you, Charlotte dear. (She closes her parasol and enters.) You really mustn't spoil me so much: I'm getting perfectly helpless.

(She drops her bag: JOAN and CHARLOTTE dive after it. JOAN retrieves it.)

Thank you, my sweet!

(By this time she has sunk into the long chair R.C. JOAN and CHARLOTTE put cushions at her back. FREDDIE strolls over L., and picks up "The Tattler." The GENERAL has stayed on the verandah. He is now standing L., looking down on the sea through field-glasses.)

GENERAL. H'm! Visibility good this morning? Yes—quite satisfactory!

LADY MAYNARD (*going up and taking glasses*). Harry! (*She puts them on table L.*)

GENERAL. Yes, dear!

(JOAN and CHARLOTTE sit at the table R.)

(*By this time all are settled.*)

(A FRENCH PHOTOGRAPHER appears from up R.C., with the usual box-camera. He takes off his hat politely, and begins to focus.)

JOAN. Are you quite comfortable now, Imogen dear?

IMOGEN. I'm feeling lovely, thank you, Joan. (*She notices the PHOTOGRAPHER.*) Eric dear, look at that man. Please stop him!

ERIC (*without moving*). I don't suppose he can speak English, poor fellow!

FREDDIE. Leave him to me. (*Crossing to R. of PHOTOGRAPHER.*) Attention, s'il vous plait!

PHOTOGRAPHER (*taking off hat*). Bonjour, monsieur!

FREDDIE. Regardez ici!

PHOTOGRAPHER. Mais oui, Monsieur!

FREDDIE. Madame la Duchesse ne desire pas être—er—tiré—

PHOTOGRAPHER. Qu'est ce que c'est?

FREDDIE. Portrayé—

PHOTOGRAPHER. Comment?

FREDDIE. Comment yourself! Photographié—ce matin. Anyhow, there's nothing doing. Buzz off! Fiche moi!

PHOTOGRAPHER } (*angrily*). Ah, sale Anglais! Espèce
de saligaud! Assassin!
FREDDIE. } (*together*). { I don't know any more French, but
go to blazes, prestissimo!

PHOTOGRAPHER (*getting the last word*). Rosbif!

(*Exit up R.*)

IMOGEN. Thank you, Freddie!

FREDDIE (*to ERIC*). That's me, old man. Bilingual! (*He goes L. again.*)

GENERAL (*coming down C.*). Who's going to bathe this morning? (*He addresses those in bathing-costumes.*) Joan, Charlotte, Freddie? Not you, Eric?

ERIC. No; I'm leaving, General. I must go and pack up in a minute.

GENERAL. Aren't you coming in, Duchess?

IMOGEN. I've had to give it up, General.

GENERAL. Why?

CHARLOTTE. The people here don't give the poor darling a chance. They simply mob her in the water. They swim round her,

and dive underneath her, and crowd on to the raft beside her. One man actually splashed her the other day, on purpose.

FREDDIE (*over L.*). A wave broke over her, too. Of course it didn't know.

IMOGEN (*plaintively*). Freddie, don't be unkind to me. It was my own fault, really, for coming here.

GENERAL. Once these places get into the papers they're done for. You never set eyes on a single decent-looking——

(*The BATHING LADY passes slowly from R. to L. along the verandah, in another bathing-suit, carrying her wrap and smoking a cigarette. She smiles at the GENERAL, and disappears up L. The GENERAL glances at his watch.*)

Hallo! Time is getting on; I had no idea! I think I'm about due to go in.

FREDDIE. Off the deep end, General?

GENERAL. Oh, just in and out again, you know, to test the temperature. *Au revoir*, Duchess!

(*He hurries off, L. of verandah.*)

JOAN. Shall we follow and chaperon him, Lady Maynard?

LADY MAYNARD. You can try, my dear, but you'll have your work cut out.

JOAN. Righto! Come on, Freddie! Come on, Charlotte!

(*FREDDIE and JOAN run off, L. of verandah, taking off their wraps as they go. CHARLOTTE lingers.*)

CHARLOTTE (*to IMOGEN*). Would you rather I stayed with you, darling?

IMOGEN. No, darling; go and have a nice long bathe.

CHARLOTTE (*a little hurt*). Very well, darling.

(*She goes off L., after JOAN and FREDDIE. ERIC, with a deep sigh, looks at his watch, and rises.*)

IMOGEN (*plaintively*). Oh, Eric, are you going to leave us already?

ERIC. Yes. (*IMOGEN gives a little moan.*) I've got to get out of this clown's clothing which you make me wear, Imogen, and pay my bill. My train leaves at one.

IMOGEN. But it's still quite early, dear.

ERIC. I always allow myself twenty minutes at a station.

IMOGEN. But you'll come back and say good-bye, won't you?

ERIC (*precisely*). At twelve twenty-five.

(*He exits R. LADY MAYNARD crosses and sits at table R., with knitting. At the same moment CHEPSTOW appears from up L. with his mattress, which he lays on couch R. of verandah, and lies down, with face turned away.*)

LADY MAYNARD. Nice man! So definite!

IMOGEN. That describes him completely. *(She sighs.)*

LADY MAYNARD *(dryly)*. I see. Then you haven't been here before, Duchess?

IMOGEN. No. Last year I didn't go anywhere, I just stayed quietly at our place in Scotland. I was in rather deep mourning, you see.

LADY MAYNARD. Of course.

IMOGEN. And before that—well, we never came to places like this. Poor Willie didn't enjoy foreign watering-places very much. You see, he was nearly twenty years older than I was. Besides, he always took his position very seriously.

LADY MAYNARD. It was a very great position, my dear.

IMOGEN. I once got him as far as Le Touquet—and there a dreadful thing happened.

LADY MAYNARD. What was that?

IMOGEN. The waiter at breakfast took him for an American, and gave him two boiled eggs mashed up in a glass. We never went abroad again.

LADY MAYNARD. Well, after all, I expect he had plenty to occupy him at home. I have. *(She goes L. and takes up glasses from table L.)*

IMOGEN. Yes; he had a wonderful sense of public duty, hadn't he? I try to follow in his footsteps, but it isn't easy.

LADY MAYNARD. He was Chairman of the Great Eastern Hospital, wasn't he?

IMOGEN. Yes.

LADY MAYNARD. I knew one or two people on the Board; they said he was a most methodical Chairman. *(She goes out on verandah.)*

IMOGEN *(sighing)*. He was like that as a husband, too.

LADY MAYNARD. Talking of methodical husbands—*(She suddenly catches sight of someone down below, and takes a look through the glasses.)* Ah, as I thought! That old man of mine has given Joan and Freddie the slip already. I expect he's treading water behind the raft: that's a favourite lurking-place of his. I've known him stay there for hours. *(She picks up her bag and parasol from table L.)*

IMOGEN. Aren't you afraid of his being drowned?

LADY MAYNARD. No. I've thought it out, and I've decided that his end will be quite different. He'll turn round once too often in a crowded street to look at a girl's ankles, and get run over—I hope by a Ford! Excuse me, my dear.

(She goes off, L. of verandah.)

(IMOGEN picks up a magazine, and is about to settle down when CHEPSTOW rises and strolls in C.)

CHEPSTOW *(cheerfully)*. Good morning, partner!

IMOGEN *(looking up, a little surprised, and smiling faintly)*. Good morning.

CHEPSTOW. What a night!

IMOGEN (*with the same polite smile*). I'm afraid I don't quite understand.

CHEPSTOW (*sitting on table R. of her*). Now don't pretend. You understood perfectly. Cigarette? (*He offers the case.*)

IMOGEN. No, thank you; I don't smoke.

CHEPSTOW (*accusingly*). You've forgotten all about me!

IMOGEN (*politely apologetic*). I'm afraid I'm very stupid about faces.

CHEPSTOW. Well, if you can't remember faces, perhaps you can remember francs—eighty to the pound! We ran a bank together last night, and scooped fourteen mille. You've got your half in this little bag. (*Taking her bag from her lap and putting it down again.*) Now do you remember?

IMOGEN (*coldly*). Oh, *chemin de fer*? Of course. Please forgive me. Some people look so unrecognizable in evening clothes, don't they?

CHEPSTOW. I'd recognize you in—even later in the evening than that!

IMOGEN (*hurriedly*). It was very kind of you to offer to take me into your bank. I don't think I ought to have consented—and I don't think I ought to have taken the money. I should like to give it back to you.

CHEPSTOW. Don't be ridiculous, and listen to me. I want you to come out in my speed-boat this afternoon, and bring the gang. We might run over to the Islands.

IMOGEN. I'm afraid I have an engagement this afternoon.

CHEPSTOW. I don't believe you: but if you're engaged this afternoon we'll run a little bank together to-night—what?

IMOGEN. I don't think I shall be at the Casino to-night.

CHEPSTOW. Of course you'll be at the Casino to-night! You're there every night—right in the thick of it. (*Leaning over towards her.*) And I know why!

IMOGEN (*getting more and more annoyed, but still maintaining a polite attitude*). Oh?

CHEPSTOW. Yes. You go because you get a thrill out of it—the kind of thrill you hardly ever get. It's a real treat to you to stop being a Duchess for a bit and get well pushed about in a crowd. A Casino's a grand place for that: almost as good as a Cup Tie. Once you've sat down at a table and staked your chips, nobody cares who you are—and you don't care a damn yourself! What a relief—for you!

IMOGEN (*faintly*). Relief—me?

CHEPSTOW (*rising and walking L.*). Yes—to feel that you're free for an hour or two from the bunch of yessers that you have to go around with all day long.

IMOGEN (*who is getting slightly hypnotized by his effrontery*). Yessers?

CHEPSTOW. You've been yessed from the day you were born, Duchess. "Yes, your Graee!" "Yes, Imogen dear!" "Yes, Imogen darling!" Do you know what you'd enjoy hearing for once in a way? (*Going close, and leaning over her.*) "No, Imogen!" "Certainly not, Imogen!" "Shut up, Ginny!"

IMOGEN (*rising, almost tearfully*). Ginny!

CHEPSTOW. Yes—Ginny! (*He pulls her down, and sits facing up-stage.*) Haven't you ever been called Ginny by anybody?

IMOGEN. Certainly not.

CHEPSTOW. Never a pet name in all your life! You poor little misery!

IMOGEN (*still trying to be distant*). Of course, you know, some women prefer to be addressed properly.

CHEPSTOW. No woman wants to be addressed properly. It's the other way round. I know women!

IMOGEN. I'm afraid you don't know them all. And—well—really—I don't know you, do I?

CHEPSTOW (*quite unabashed*). You soon will, when we've run a few more banks together. We run our next one to-night.

IMOGEN. I don't think so, thank you.

CHEPSTOW (*suddenly*). You're afraid of losing.

IMOGEN (*involuntarily*). No, I'm not!

CHEPSTOW. Yes, you are! Cold feet, that's what's the matter with you!

IMOGEN (*rising, with great dignity*). Will you go away, please!

CHEPSTOW (*rising*). I was right. You're frightened.

IMOGEN (*desperately*). I'm not frightened!

CHEPSTOW. Very well, then; run another bank with me to-night!

IMOGEN. No.

CHEPSTOW. Yes. (*His face is close to hers.*)

IMOGEN. No.

CHEPSTOW (*looking her straight in the face, softly*). Yes!

(*Enter ROSE TORRENT up R. CHEPSTOW turns quickly.*)

Hallo, Rose! Going in at last?

ROSE (*calmly*). Presently.

(*She exchanges meaning glances with CHEPSTOW. IMOGEN sits in her chair R.C. again.*)

CHEPSTOW. Duchess, this is an old friend of mine. Mrs. John Torrent—the Duchess of Rye. (*He goes c.*)

IMOGEN (*thankful for the diversion, smiling*). How do you do?

ROSE. How do you do? (*She goes to IMOGEN and shakes hands.*)

IMOGEN. Won't you sit here for a moment or two? Or are you in a hurry?

ROSE. No, I'm in no hurry! I should love to talk for a bit. (*She sits down R. of IMOGEN.*)

IMOGEN (*formally*). Is this your first visit to Antibes ?

ROSE. Yes. It's a bit of a change from where I spent last August.

IMOGEN. Where was that ?

ROSE. Blackpool.

IMOGEN (*politely*). I don't think I've ever been there.

CHEPSTOW (C.). I bet you haven't !

IMOGEN (*ignoring him*). What is Blackpool like ?

ROSE. Well, have you ever been to Margate ?

IMOGEN. No, I'm afraid I haven't been to Margate, either.

ROSE. They're bigger places than this—about a thousand times bigger, and about a thousand times more free and easy. And that's saying something.

CHEPSTOW. If you see a girl on the beach, and you like the look of her, you go straight up to her and tell her so. They'd be fairly queueing up for you, Duchess. You ought to go there.

ROSE (*seeing IMOGEN flinch*). Chepstow, if you can't be more amusing than this, you'd better go away.

CHEPSTOW. As a matter of fact, I'm going. I've got to put on some clothes for lunch. Don't forget our date to-night, partner !

(*He goes off L., into bar. ROSE watches him out of sight ; then she turns and looks at IMOGEN. They both smile, IMOGEN gives a sigh of relief.*)

IMOGEN. Have you known that—gentleman for long ? I'm not quite sure of his name.

ROSE. Chepstow's the name. He's an old friend of mine. Sometimes I wish he wasn't.

IMOGEN. I see. Old friends are sometimes inclined to presume, aren't they ?

ROSE. They are. Chepstow wants keeping in his place all the time. The trouble about him is that he's so *sure* of himself.

IMOGEN. Yes, I noticed that. I suppose he's been out of the Army for some time ?

ROSE. Yes. He had some sort of commission during the War. I first met him in the Cavalry Barracks at York, at a Sergeants' Ball. He was just as sure of himself then as he is now. And when a man's as sure of himself as that, he ought to be chained up. Chepstow can do what he likes with two things—a horse and a woman.

IMOGEN (*gently*). Only a certain type of woman, don't you think ?

ROSE. There's only one type of woman, Duchess—and people like Chepstow know it. That's what I mean when I say he ought to be chained up. (*She rises and goes L.*)

IMOGEN (*slightly intrigued, despite herself*). Has he a bad reputation, then ?

ROSE. I couldn't say now : I haven't seen much of him lately, thank the Lord !

(EAVES appears up R. He collects CHEPSTOW's mattress, etc., and goes out.)

There's a gentleman who could tell you a bit, if he cared to open his mouth—his manservant, Eaves. But perhaps Chepstow makes it worth his while not to.

(JOHN TORRENT appears from the door L.)

Hallo, here's John—come to hurry me up, I expect.

TORRENT. Haven't you made a hole in that water yet, Rose?

ROSE. No, I haven't. This is my husband, Duchess. He's an old fusser, but he's above the average otherwise.

IMOGEN (*graciously*). How do you do, Mr. Torrent. Mr. John Torrent?

TORRENT. Yes.

IMOGEN. You're the new Chairman of the Great Eastern Hospital?

TORRENT. That's right.

IMOGEN (*shaking hands*). Oh, I'm so glad to meet you. You succeeded my husband.

TORRENT. Yes. He was a rare difficult man to follow. They miss him on the Board, Duchess.

IMOGEN (*rather reproachfully*). We all miss him. How has the Hospital done this year, Mr. Torrent?

TORRENT (*shaking his head*). I expect there'll be another deficit.

IMOGEN. Oh dear! And I'm afraid I can't help. You know what Death Duties are.

TORRENT. There's no call for you to worry, Duchess. That's the Chairman's job. It's up to him to shout into the public's ear until the public wakes up and puts its hand into its pocket. That's what's known as the Voluntary System of Hospital Maintenance.

ROSE. Where are you going to start your shouting, John?

TORRENT. Well, I thought of getting up some sort of a show in the West End.

ROSE. A ball?

TORRENT. No; one of those midnight shows—at a swell cinema—a pre-release of some new film—with Royalty in the Dress Circle and the audience getting photographed for nothing as they come in. That's the ticket for soup, these days.

ROSE. Well, I'll help, either way. (*Suddenly*.) John, listen! Why don't you ask the Duchess to be President of the Committee—or Patron?

TORRENT. Oh, it's early to be talking about that now—(ROSE nudges him.) Well—anyhow—it's an idea. What would you say, Duchess?

IMOGEN (*on the defensive at once*). Well—I should have to think about that. Of course—I live very quietly now.

ROSE. You wouldn't be bothered with any work or public

appearances. Your name would sell half the tickets straight off. And it is *your* Hospital—(turning to TORRENT) isn't it, John?

TORRENT. I should say it was. They'll never forget your name there, or the Duke's.

IMOGEN (smiling graciously). Thank you.

ROSE. Still, we mustn't worry the Duchess now, or she'll think we're trying to hold her up. I must have that bathe of mine before the sea runs dry! (She turns L. for hat, etc.)

TORRENT. Good morning, Duchess! (He goes L. and waits.)

IMOGEN. Good morning, Mr. Torrent! (She offers her hand: ROSE comes back and takes it.) Good morning, Mrs. Torrent. Thank you so much for coming to my rescue just now.

ROSE. There's no need to thank me for that. (Impulsively.) Duchess, shall I tell you something? When we came to Antibes, and John asked me how long I wanted to stay, I said: "I don't leave this place until I've met that lovely Duchess of Rye, if it's only for five minutes!" Was that very pushing and vulgar of me?

IMOGEN (smiling). I think it was very flattering.

ROSE. No, it wasn't: it was straight! I meant it! There—I had to tell you that! (Awkwardly.) Good day. (She turns suddenly on her husband.) John, don't stand there keeping me waiting!

(She hurries off up L., followed by TORRENT.)

(IMOGEN sinks back in her chair. She takes the mille notes out of her bag, and looks at them, frowning.)

(ERIC RICHMOND appears up R., dressed for travelling.)

ERIC (at c. opening). Hallo, Imogen! All alone?

IMOGEN. Yes—thank goodness!

ERIC. Oh! Sorry! (He turns to go.)

IMOGEN. Eric dear, don't be stupid about *everything*!

ERIC. But you said "Thank goodness."

IMOGEN. I only meant that I'd got rid of some rather strange people.

ERIC (reassured). Oh! Bores or bounders? (He enters c. opening.)

IMOGEN. A Mr. and Mrs. John Torrent.

ERIC. I know them. They're all right: I like them both. What did they do to you?

IMOGEN. Nothing.

ERIC. Then what are you upset about?

IMOGEN (plaintively). Eric, don't bully me! I'm not upset.

ERIC. But, Imogen, you said "Thank goodness."

(IMOGEN moans faintly. He puts hat on table L.)

Perhaps somebody else has upset you. Was there somebody else?

IMOGEN (after slight hesitation). No, there was nobody else.

ERIC. I thought I saw that fearful fellow Chepstow hanging about not long ago.

IMOGEN. I don't know why all the men here call him a fearful fellow. He's quite attractive, in a way.

ERIC. Has he been talking to you?

IMOGEN. No.

(There is a babble of voices, off up L. CHARLOTTE appears.)

CHARLOTTE. Imogen, darling! Here we are! Have you been very lonely?

IMOGEN. Anything but, dear!

CHARLOTTE *(noticing ERIC)*. Oh, I see!

(She goes out C. and off up R. The GENERAL and LADY MAYNARD appear up L.)

GENERAL. My dear, what else could I do? She said she had cramp!

(LADY MAYNARD turns and looks at him. Enter FREDDIE, up L., followed by JOAN.)

FREDDIE. Well, my opinion of salt water as a beverage is unchanged.

JOAN. I'll run and put my things on, and come back for you, Imogen. Good-bye, Eric. Don't stay away so long this time.

(FREDDIE and JOAN shake hands with ERIC and go out and off up R.)

GENERAL. Where are you off to this time, Richmond? Luxor again?

ERIC. Farther south, General—a new place altogether. It sounds damned exciting.

GENERAL. It sounds damned dull to me—and dusty! The very idea gives me a thirst: come along up to the bar. *(His wife nudges him.)* Eh? Oh! *(Shakes hands violently with ERIC and follows his wife out C. and off up R. IMOGEN and ERIC are now alone. ERIC looks at his watch, then stands gazing at IMOGEN.)*

IMOGEN. How much time have you got, Eric?

ERIC. Four minutes.

IMOGEN. Oh! *(Presently.)* How long do you expect to be away?

ERIC. Eight months.

IMOGEN. Oh! *(Presently.)* Must you always go and dig up mummies?

ERIC *(he crosses R. to table, and sits)*. One doesn't really dig them up: one unwraps them; they're lying all laid out, in a sort of underground—

IMOGEN. Yes, dear, I'm sure you're right. But must you? It sounds such a gritty life.

ERIC. Grit suits me.

IMOGEN. Yes, dear. But couldn't you come and work in London?

ERIC. Where? Kensal Green?

IMOGEN. Eric, darling, don't talk like an undertaker, please! You know what I meant quite well. You're wasting your life. Your friends never see you. What keeps **you** out there, when you might be living in civilized places, like—like——

ERIC. Like this.

IMOGEN. Yes.

ERIC. I can answer that one. It's places like this that send people like me to dig for mummies. I'd sooner work my passage across the Atlantic in a cattle boat than put in another fortnight here. I loathe having to breakfast at eleven in the morning. I loathe having to wait till ten o'clock at night for my dinner. I loathe head-waiters, and croupiers, and fat women in one-piece bathing-suits! As for the modern young man and woman, half the time I'm mistaking one for the other—and then I'm wrong! Of course your cousin Freddie's all right—and so's Joan Thingummy, your secretary. But the rest——! *(He makes a disapproving noise.)*

IMOGEN *(admiringly)*. I love to hear you talk, Eric. You say such splendid things.

ERIC. Bah!

IMOGEN. But you're exaggerating a little bit, you know. London is full of nice people.

ERIC. Such as——?

(Enter up R., SAM. He crosses to C. opening and looks in.)

SAM. Good morning!

ERIC *(gruffly)*. Morning!

(SAM looks out to sea, and his hand goes to his pocket, longingly. Then he takes another look at ERIC and IMOGEN and sighs.)

SAM. It's of no consequence.

(He exits up L.)

IMOGEN. Let me see, what was I saying?

ERIC. You said London was full of nice people.

IMOGEN. Oh, yes. Now why don't you go and settle down there, and marry a wife?

ERIC. Where could I find a wife?

IMOGEN. It might not be so difficult.

ERIC *(severely)*. It would be very difficult indeed. *(Rises and goes L.)* And anyhow, I'm not one of those fellows who can sit down and gas to a woman about love, and affinity, and soul-mates, and similar bilge.

IMOGEN. It wouldn't be necessary, dear. Ask her to marry you: that would be quite enough.

ERIC. Suppose she said no? A nice fool I'd look!

IMOGEN. Eric darling, don't be so self-conscious.

ERIC (*annoyed*). I'm not!

IMOGEN. Oh, yes, you are—self-conscious and sensitive. You must have more confidence in yourself. Look at Major Chepstow.

ERIC (*turning towards her quickly*). What?

IMOGEN. I was only taking him as an example—from what I've heard of him.

ERIC (*severely*). A nice example, I must say, Imogen!

IMOGEN. Not in every way, of course. But he's got one quality—so I'm told.

ERIC. What one?

IMOGEN. If he wants a thing, what does he do? He goes and gets it!

ERIC. Does he?

IMOGEN. Yes. He's so sure of himself. (*With a slight assumption of ROSE TORRENT'S manner.*) He can do anything he likes with two things—a horse and a woman. (ERIC gazes at her incredulously.) A woman of a certain type, that is. (*Getting a little confused under ERIC'S gaze.*) No, I'm wrong. There's only one type of woman really, and—

ERIC. Imogen, what on earth are you talking about?

IMOGEN. Eric dear, you're bullying me again—and you mustn't, must you? (*Pathetically.*)

ERIC (*penitently*). I'm sorry, Imogen. I'm a cad. I know what an effort it must be for you to talk like this. (*Sentimentally.*) I know how you miss poor old Willie, all the time. It must be painful for you even to think of such things as marriage. (*Shakes his head sympathetically.*) Yet here you are, putting your own private feelings aside and trying to help me. (IMOGEN gives a little sigh, and subsides again.) I see what you're getting after, of course. Oh, yes. You think I'm suffering from one of those things—what do you call it?—an inferiority something.

IMOGEN. Yes, dear, you are, and I'm trying to get you out of it. What you don't realize is that you are a wonderful man.

ERIC. Don't be ridiculous, Imogen!

IMOGEN. But you are, dear. Any woman would be glad to marry you. You've only got to ask her—ask her as if you meant it. (*Plaintively.*) Can't you think of one?

ERIC. None!

IMOGEN. None at all?

ERIC. None that's within my reach, I mean.

IMOGEN (*starting up and coming to him, c.*). Any woman is within your reach, Eric, if only you'd have the sense to open your eyes, and—

ERIC. Imogen— (*He takes a deep breath, and is about to say something further. He lays his left hand on IMOGEN'S shoulder, and suddenly notices his wrist-watch.*) My God—my train! I must leg it! (*He picks up his hat and goes out c.*) Good-bye!

(*He hurries off up R. IMOGEN goes up C. and looks off R. after him.*)

IMOGEN (*crossly*). Oh, good-bye!

(*CHEPSTOW appears from the bar L., with a whisky and soda in his hand.*)

CHEPSTOW. Poor little Ginny! (*She turns round.*) Why don't you try Margate?

(*He drinks to her. She stands motionless.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE.—*The Library at 147 Grosvenor Square, the DUCHESS OF RYE'S town house.*

The main entrance to the room is R., through double doors. At back, windows lead on to a balcony. R.C. is a large refectory table, set ready for a committee meeting. There are chairs round the table. (See Ground Plan of Scene.)

CHARLES and THOMAS are arranging chairs.

CHARLES (C.). The usual chair for her Grace, Thomas, at the head of the table.

THOMAS (R., moving a chair to R. end of table). O.K., Charlie. Have you got enough for the rest of 'em?

CHARLES. An ample supply, Thomas. Eleven o'clock in the morning is a bit on the early side for this lot. Don't forget to lay out plenty of ashtrays, whatever you do. Women with lighted cigarettes ought never to be allowed in the same room with decent furniture. (*He points to mark on table.*) Look!

THOMAS. Crikey! Who did that?

CHARLES. I give you one guess.

THOMAS. That Lady Charlotte?

CHARLES. That's the one. The human stove-pipe, to be candid. His late Grace would have had a word to say to her. (*He looks up at portrait over fireplace.*)

THOMAS. Ticked her off proper, eh?

CHARLES. He certainly would. He had one of those tidy minds. There wasn't much in the way of cigarette-ends and thumbmarks got past him. (*He turns and looks at R. end of table.*) Are her Grace's reading-glasses in their place?

THOMAS. I don't see them anywhere, Charlie. (*He looks on bureau R.*)

CHARLES. They must be downstairs: I'll fetch them.

(*He exits R.* THOMAS puts his hands in his pockets, and goes up to window; then turns and looks up at portrait. He waves a defiant hand at it, then comes to table, and is about to help himself to cigarettes, when enter JOAN, L., with tray containing agenda papers, etc.)

JOAN. Good morning, Thomas. Everything ready for the Committee Meeting?

THOMAS. I think so, miss.

JOAN (*L. of table*). Don't forget to put a pencil by each of those writing-pads.

THOMAS. Righto, miss. (*He gets pencils from drawer in bureau.*) But what's the use? All they ever do is to draw funny faces with them.

JOAN. Well, can you blame them, sitting opposite to each other?

THOMAS (*laughing*). You do say things, miss! (*Confidentially.*) Talking about faces, were you here in his late Grace's time?

JOAN. Yes, for a month or two.

THOMAS. And did he really look like that, miss?

JOAN (*looking over her shoulder at portrait*). It's a presentation portrait, but it is like him. Why?

THOMAS. I don't like his eye, miss. It follows you all round the room.

JOAN. I've noticed that too.

THOMAS. It gives me the creeps sometimes.

JOAN. When you're pinching the cigarettes, I suppose?

THOMAS. Yes, miss. No!

(*Enter CHARLES.*)

CHARLES. Mr. Eaves, miss, from next door. (*He lays IMOGEN'S spectacles on R. end of table.*)

JOAN. And who may Mr. Eaves be?

CHARLES. Mrs. Torrent's butler, miss. He's brought a cheque from Mrs. Torrent, for some extra tickets she bought for the entertainment.

JOAN. Well, where is it?

CHARLES. He wished to hand it to some responsible person, miss. It's a biggish one, he says.

JOAN. It would be. All right: bounce him in.

(*CHARLES goes out and brings in EAVES, who is dressed as a butler.*)

Good morning!

EAVES (*respectfully*). Good morning, madam. Mrs. Torrent wished me to hand you this.

(*He offers an envelope. CHARLES passes it on.*)

JOAN (*taking it*). All right. Good morning!

EAVES. Good morning, madam. (*He turns to go.*)

JOAN (*looking after him*). I say! (*He turns to her.*) Haven't I seen you before somewhere?

EAVES. Possibly at Cap d'Antibes, madam, last summer.

JOAN. But you weren't with Mrs. Torrent then.

EAVES. No, madam. I was with a Major Chepstow.

JOAN. And you've left him?

EAVES. We parted, madam.

JOAN. Well, these things happen. Good morning!

EAVES. Good morning, madam.

(Enter FREDDIE, R. EAVES goes out R., passing him.)

FREDDIE. Good morning. (To CHARLES and THOMAS, as they pass out.) Good morning! Good morning! (To the portrait over the fire.) Good morning, Willie!

JOAN (cheerfully). Hallo, darling! Are the Law Courts closed to-day?

FREDDIE. Practically—until I get there.

JOAN. Then why not go there, my child?

FREDDIE. Because I prefer to come here for an hour or two. Ask me why.

JOAN. Why?

FREDDIE. Because I love you so, my sweet. Now what do I get?

JOAN. All right. Get it over: I'm busy. (They kiss. She offers him a paper.) Like an agenda paper?

FREDDIE. No. (Taking it.) Is there much to do?

JOAN. Nothing whatever, but they like to feel busy. Thank Heaven, it's the last meeting!

FREDDIE. Is Imogen going to take the chair? (He sits on R. chair below table.)

JOAN (above table). Yes. She'll be down in a minute.

CHARLES (entering R.). Lady Charlotte Teignmouth.

(Enter CHARLOTTE.)

CHARLOTTE. Good morning, Joanny! Have I come too early?

FREDDIE (gloomily). Death usually comes too early!

CHARLOTTE (noticing him). Got a cigarette? (He rises and gives her one.) Thanks. (She lights it, and goes L.)

FREDDIE. Do I have to do anything?

CHARLOTTE. God forbid!

JOAN. Yes. There is a cordial vote of thanks to our Splendid Helpers.

FREDDIE. And I reply?

JOAN. Don't be absurd, dear.

FREDDIE. Well (modestly). I could hardly propose it, could I?

JOAN. You don't propose it: Imogen does that. You second it.

FREDDIE. Righto! But you're wasting me completely.

CHARLOTTE (who has been gazing up at the portrait of the late Duke, turning suddenly). I say, what a mercy it is that darling Imogen never had a baby. (She sits in armchair L.) Well, did the show make a profit?

JOAN. Two thousand pounds.

CHARLOTTE (declining to be impressed). Oh. Any odd coppers?

JOAN. No. The profit was really about eighteen hundred and fifty; but Mrs. Torrent butted in with a cheque, making it up to the round sum.

FREDDIE. Decent of her.

CHARLOTTE. Disgustingly pushing!

JOAN. She may push, but she's wasting her time.

CHARLOTTE. She's managed to get into this house, anyhow.

JOAN. But only as a Splendid Helper.

CHARLOTTE. Hasn't she been invited to any of Imogen's parties ?

JOAN. No. Yes, one—to meet the Bishop of Eastern Polynesia, the Archdeacon of Kuala Lumpur, and Members of the Missionary Endeavour Society. (*Indicating the portrait again.*) Missionaries were one of his late dear Grace's side-lines. We still entertain a bunch of them once a year.

FREDDIE. What a pity he didn't make a side-line of Mr. Cochran's Young Ladies ! *What an annual commemoration we could have had !*

CHARLOTTE. And did Mrs. Torrent come ?

JOAN. Yes, she came all right.

FREDDIE. And I may tell you she was the life and soul of the show : wore the Flamborough Pearls and clicked with the Bishop himself. (*He goes up to balcony.*)

JOAN. Needless to say, the inevitable happened directly afterwards.

CHARLOTTE. You mean she invited Imogen back ?

JOAN. Next morning.

CHARLOTTE. My dear, not to breakfast ?

JOAN. No ; to a ball.

CHARLOTTE. Ah ! Declined, of course ?

JOAN (*nodding*). And I rather fancy it learned her. She's giving another big ball to-night—her last for the season—and this time she hasn't sent an invitation.

FREDDIE. I wish she'd send me one. I hear it's going to be lots of fun.

CHARLOTTE. Freddie, I half suspect you of being pro-Torrent.

FREDDIE (*thoughtfully*). I rather think I am. And why not ? She's on the make, of course ; but then, aren't we all ? And she's no snob. She's managed to get most of London to come to her parties this summer, but she hasn't dropped a single one of her old friends. She even invites her brother Sam. Sam's a menace to any party, and she knows it ; but she goes on letting him come—imitations and all ! I like her for that. (*He comes between the two girls. Warming up to his subject.*) And let me tell you something else. Rose Torrent's a fighter, and it's not in her nature to take snubs lying down. She's been far the hardest worker over this show of Imogen's, and far the biggest contributor, and yet most of the women on the committee have treated her like dirt. Imogen hasn't, of course : she's always sweet to everybody. But the rest of you have, and one day, if you aren't jolly careful, she'll go up in red fire and blow you all sky-high—and may I be there to see !

(CHARLES appears at the door R.)

CHARLES. Mrs. John Torrent.

(Enter ROSE TORRENT. CHARLES goes out.)

ROSE. Good morning, Miss Buckland. (*She comes below table.*)

JOAN. Good morning, Mrs. Torrent.

FREDDIE. Our tower of strength. (*He shakes hands.*)

ROSE. Don't you believe it, Freddie! (*Looking round.*) Where's that old husband of mine?

FREDDIE. He isn't a member of the Committee, is he?

ROSE. No; but he's coming here this morning to receive the cheque on behalf of the Hospital. It's not like him to be late.

FREDDIE. It's only just eleven. He'll be along all right.

ROSE (*sitting L. end of table*). If anybody has the right to be late, it's me. This is one of my busy days: I've been on my feet since seven o'clock this morning.

CHARLOTTE (*languidly*). Is there such an hour? (*She goes and sits on stool L., facing up.*)

ROSE (*sharply*: CHARLOTTE is her "bête noire"). Yes, young woman, there is; and let me tell you—

FREDDIE (*interposing quickly*). Cigarette?

ROSE (*recovering herself, gratefully*). Thank you. (*She takes a cigarette, then turns to JOAN.*) I'm giving a party to-night, and you know what caterers are like! And as for these modern dance bands—ooh! I rang up the Principal Coon, or whatever he calls himself, at breakfast-time, and told him to come along and see me about the music; and do you know what he had the nerve to say to me? He said he'd just gone to bed! And do you know what I said to him? I said if he wasn't round at my house by ten sharp I'd come along to his Old Kentucky Home in Soho, and pull him out by the ears!

CHARLOTTE. And did you?

ROSE. No. He was there by ten all right. You can usually get what you want in this world if you give your mind to it. (*To JOAN.*) By the way, how is the Duchess this morning?

JOAN (*rather formally*). She is very well, thank you.

ROSE (*as if she had thought of this for the first time*). I wonder if she would like to come to my party.

(JOAN, above table, and CHARLOTTE exchange glances.)

Of course I'd have sent her an invitation long ago, but I know she hardly ever goes out at all in the regular way. Still, my house being next door—if she doesn't happen to be doing anything—and feels like a bite of supper before bedtime—well, there's no harm in suggesting a thing, is there? (*She says all this rather defiantly, conscious that the atmosphere is against her.*)

FREDDIE (*at C. window*). None whatever.

JOAN. I've an idea that the Duchess is going out this evening.

ROSE. All evening?

JOAN. Yes. (*She takes engagement book from table and goes R.*)

ROSE. Are you sure?

JOAN. Practically.

ROSE. Has she got it written down in that engagement book?

JOAN (*quickly*). I'm afraid it's not her engagement book. It's mine. (*She lays it on the bureau, down R.*)

ROSE. You must be a very popular young woman. Never mind; I'll ask her myself when she comes in.

JOAN. I wouldn't if I were you. I know she can't come to-night. (*She goes up above table again.*)

CHARLOTTE. I'm sure she'll be missing something if she doesn't!

ROSE. That's just it: she will be missing something!

(CHARLES *appears R.*)

CHARLES. General Maynard; Mr. John Torrent.

(*Enter the GENERAL and JOHN TORRENT. Exit CHARLES.*)

JOAN. Good morning, General!

GENERAL. Good morning, my dear! Very nice you're looking, too. Morning, Mrs. Torrent! We're coming to your party to-night. I hear you've got some big surprises for us, as usual.

ROSE. Trust me, General!

(*Meanwhile TORRENT has shaken hands with JOAN and come to ROSE. The GENERAL moves L. to CHARLOTTE.*)

GENERAL. Ah, Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE. Good morning, General.

TORRENT. What's upset you, Rose?

ROSE. You would notice that!

(*The doors R. are opened by CHARLES, and IMOGEN enters briskly.*)

IMOGEN. Good morning, everybody!

(*All turn to her.*)

GENERAL CHORUS. Good morning, Imogen! Good morning, Duchess! *etc.*

IMOGEN (*shaking hands with TORRENT*). Good morning, Mr. Torrent! How good of you to come yourself. I know how dreadfully busy you are.

TORRENT. I'm never too busy to come and collect a cheque, Duchess; and I hear it's a big one. You've done finely.

IMOGEN (*standing between TORRENT and ROSE, who is sitting*). Oh, I did nothing. It was Mrs. Torrent: she's been perfectly wonderful. (*To ROSE.*) What can I do to show my gratitude, Mrs. Torrent?

ROSE. Shall I tell you?

IMOGEN. Yes, please.

ROSE. Come to my party to-night.

IMOGEN (*completely taken aback, but quickly recovering her poise*). To-night? Let me think—I'm very much afraid I'm booked up to-night. I'll just make sure. (*She goes R. and consults the engage-*

ment-book, to the concern of JOAN and CHARLOTTE.) Alas, yes! I am. I'm so sorry; but thank you ever so much for asking me. *(ROSE turns and looks sharply at JOAN, but JOAN has turned her back. There is an awkward pause, which IMOGEN does not quite understand, so she changes the subject.)*

Now, is everybody here?

JOAN. Nothing like. But you've got a quorum.

IMOGEN. Very well. Shall we sit down?

(All sit, as in Ground Plan.)

TORRENT. Duchess, I'm not a member of this Committee. I think I'd better wait outside somewhere, until you're ready for me.

IMOGEN *(graciously)*. Mr. Torrent, you will do no such thing! Go and sit over there by the fire for a moment, and we'll pretend you're in another room. We'll take Counsel's opinion, just to make sure. Would that make it all right, Freddie?

FREDDIE. Definitely. We shan't be long, Mr. Torrent.

(TORRENT sits in armchair, L.)

(By this time all are seated.)

IMOGEN *(putting on horn spectacles, and reading from the agenda paper)*. Minutes of the last Meeting.

JOAN. They've been circulated. We needn't worry about them, I suppose?

CHORUS. No, no! Certainly not!

IMOGEN *(reading from agenda paper)*. Letters of apology for absence.

JOAN. There aren't any. But three people have telephoned to say they're not coming. Do you want to know who they are?

ANOTHER CHORUS. No, no!

IMOGEN. Honorary Treasurer's report regarding total profit on entertainment. *(She turns to the GENERAL.)* Mr. Treasurer?

GENERAL *(rising)*. H'm! All outstanding bills have been paid, and the accounts are now made up. Owing to an extremely generous —er—eleventh-hour contribution, to which I have been asked not to refer—er—in greater detail, the exact profit amounts to two thousand pounds. I've just written a cheque for it, and a pretty tantalizing job it was! Here's the thing. *(He picks up the cheque which he has been writing.)*

IMOGEN. That brings us to the next item in the agenda. *(She takes the cheque from JOAN, who has received it from the GENERAL, and rises.)* Mr. Torrent!

FREDDIE. You can come in now, Mr. Torrent. *(TORRENT rises from the armchair and comes above the table.)*

IMOGEN. Mr. Torrent, I know you won't be so unkind as to expect me to make a speech. Here is the cheque, with our very best wishes.

(*There is mild applause. IMOGEN sits down.*)

TORRENT (*having received the cheque, goes back c. to the back of ROSE's chair*). Your Grace, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Chairman and Council of the Royal Great Eastern Hospital I beg to acknowledge the receipt of this most handsome cheque. In due course you will receive a formal vote of thanks from the Council itself—and that means that there is no excuse whatever for my making a speech on my own account now; so I will just say thank you, very gratefully. We want this money badly. These are hard times for the sick—which means for the poor. Good morning!

(*He gives a little formal bow to IMOGEN, gives his wife a furtive little pat on the shoulder, and goes out R. He goes out amid murmurs of "Good morning, Mr. Torrent!" "Thank you!" etc.*)

FREDDIE (*opening the door for him*). Good morning, Mr. Torrent. Have one on the house before you go.

IMOGEN. What a charming little speech! So businesslike.

FREDDIE. A lesson for a lot of people. What comes next, Imogen? (*He sits again.*)

IMOGEN. Vote of thanks to our Splendid Helpers.

JOAN. You propose that yourself, Imogen.

IMOGEN. Oh, do I? (*Aside to JOAN.*) Who exactly are——?

JOAN. The people who sold tickets, and the voluntary programme girls.

ROSE (*rising*). I wonder if it would be in order if I made a suggestion here. It's about the Directors of the theatre itself. They really were very good; they gave us the theatre for nothing, and even paid the—you know—the man who worked the film. It seems to me they ought to have a personal letter of thanks signed by our Chairman.

IMOGEN. I think that's a perfectly splendid suggestion. Do I have to write it myself? I'm so stupid about——

ROSE (*quickly*). I'll write it for you, if you like—now, on your own paper; and then you can sign it right away.

IMOGEN. Thank you, Mrs. Torrent.

(*ROSE goes R. to the bureau, sits down, and begins to write.*)

Now—oh dear!—I've got to make a speech! (*She rises. Applause.*) Ladies and Gentlemen, I have great pleasure in proposing a vote of thanks to our Splendid Helpers. (*Applause.*) We all know how—how—splendidly they helped—don't we?—selling tickets to people who didn't want to buy them in the least—and we all know how very, very tiresome people like that can be!—And then those darling programme girls, too—getting so much money out of the men—and having those lovely frocks made specially—and paid for out of their own pockets——

GENERAL. They haven't got any pockets! Ask their poor old fathers!

IMOGEN. Anyhow, General, it was sweet of them to be so thoughtful on our account. There, I think that's all I've got to say. I propose a hearty vote of thanks to our Splendid Helpers! (*She sits, then turns to JOAN.*) Do I put that to the vote, or anything, darling?

FREDDIE (*rising, coldly*). Not yet. Ladies and Gentlemen—

CHARLOTTE (*rising*). Oh, not you, Freddie! (*She goes L.*)

FREDDIE (*ignoring her*). It gives me modified pleasure to second this motion. I expected to have to reply to it—but no matter! And this raises the question: Failing myself, who is the most worthy person to make that reply? You ask me that? I answer, without hesitation—Mrs. John Torrent!

GENERAL (*loudly*). Hear, hear!

(*There is no response from the others. ROSE, who, having finished her letter, is now inspecting IMOGEN's engagement-book, starts on hearing her own name, and closes the book.*)

FREDDIE. The Duchess of Rye, of course, has been our figure-head throughout—and a very sweet figurehead, too—(*chorus of "Hear, hear!"*) but I know she will be the first to agree with me that Mrs. Torrent has been the motive power—the driving force—in other words, the works. I now ask you to give her a deafening round of applause—accompanied by several hearty hosannas. After which I hope Mrs. Torrent will favour us with a few words in reply. Now then, boys and girls!

(*The GENERAL, IMOGEN, and FREDDIE applaud cordially, JOAN dutifully, CHARLOTTE not at all.*)

(*Calling.*) Mrs. Torrent! Spee-eech!

ROSE (*rising and speaking rather brusquely, still down R.*). No, I'm not going to make a speech—except to say thank you on behalf of the real people—the ticket-sellers. I'll see your thanks are passed on to them. I've finished the letter to the theatre people, Duchess. (*Going up to IMOGEN.*) Will you sign it now? (*She hands letter and goes back to L. of table.*)

IMOGEN. Certainly. (*Taking up pen. To JOAN.*) Is there any more business, dear?

JOAN. None that I know of.

IMOGEN (*to the Committee*). Then thank you all, so much!

GENERAL (*rising*). Vote of thanks to our Chairman, by acclamation!

(*All rise and applaud.*)

IMOGEN (*half rising, and smiling*). Thank you! (*She sits again, and signs the letter. The rest of the party begin to disperse.*)

(*JOAN goes up L. with FREDDIE.*)

CHARLOTTE (*gathering up her bag, etc.*). Good-bye, Imogen darling!

(IMOGEN *looks up and smiles mechanically.* CHARLOTTE, *a little hurt, goes out.*)

GENERAL (*having shaken hands with ROSE*). Good-bye, Duchess!

IMOGEN (*rising*). Good-bye, General! Give my love to your nice wife.

GENERAL (*slightly puzzled*). I've only got one, you know. Coming my way, Freddie? I've got a new story for you.

FREDDIE. I'm still busy, General; but I will lend you my left ear as far as the front door. (*As they go out.*) Is it the one about the chemist's shop?

(IMOGEN *is at R. end of table, ROSE L. JOAN above table.*)

IMOGEN. Thank you so much, Mrs. Torrent. It would have taken me hours to write that myself. Joan dear, will you see that this is sent off?

JOAN (*taking letter from IMOGEN*). I'll put it with the other stuff now. (*She gathers up the agenda paper, Minute Book, etc., and goes out L.*)

ROSE (*taking up her bag, etc.*). Now I must run: I've plenty to do at home to-day. It's a pity you can't come to-night, Duchess. It's going to be a rather unusual party.

IMOGEN. I am sure it is, Mrs. Torrent.

(*Both are standing C.*)

ROSE. There's going to be a cotillion, and everybody is to have a present.

IMOGEN. That will be too exciting.

ROSE. Exciting? Yes—exciting will be the exact word. Shall I tell you why? Because each person's present is going to be the one thing they want most in the world.

IMOGEN. How can you be sure—in every case, I mean?

ROSE. I've found out, one way and another. I've taken a lot of trouble over this party.

IMOGEN (*politely*). I am sure you have.

ROSE. Your present's waiting for *you*, Duchess. (IMOGEN, *struck by her tone, looks at her curiously.*) It's a pity you're not coming to claim it, because it really is the thing you want most.

(IMOGEN *stares at her in genuine surprise.*)

(*More urgently.*) Why not come? You aren't really going out anywhere to-night, you know. At least, you've got nothing down in your engagement-book.

IMOGEN (*startled*). You looked?

ROSE. Yes. Wasn't it vulgar of me? I wouldn't have done

it in the ordinary way, but my back was up. You and Joan had both lied to me.

IMOGEN (*feebly, going L. towards fire*). It wasn't a lie at all: it was just an ordinary conventional excuse, to save your feelings.

ROSE. It was a bit late in the day to start thinking of that, wasn't it? (*Glancing towards the committee table.*) You and your Committee! What I've had to put up with from them! (*Then she turns to IMOGEN again.*) Duchess, why not come—just for half an hour? It means a lot to me: I'll be quite frank about that. But it means a lot more to you, if only you knew it.

IMOGEN. I'm afraid I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about, Mrs. Torrent. (*She offers her hand, still smiling resolutely.*) Good-bye!

ROSE (*shaking hands*). Well, we'll leave it open. Perhaps you'll change your mind at the last moment. (*She goes to the door. IMOGEN watches her. She turns.*) Anyhow, I'll send a card in for you, by my butler—Eaves! Good-bye! (*She goes out.*)

IMOGEN (*to herself, staring at the closed door*). Oh!

(JOAN enters L.)

JOAN. Everybody gone? Thank God! (*She goes and moves the GENERAL'S chair up to the window.*)

IMOGEN. Joan dear—

JOAN (*surprised at her tone*). Yes?

IMOGEN. Where have I heard the name Eaves before?

JOAN. Eaves? Eaves is the name of the Torrents' butler. He used to be manservant to that atrocious bounder at Antibes—what was his name?—Chepstow.

IMOGEN (*softly*). Chepstow! I was right! Oh! (*She sits L. of the table.*)

JOAN (*coming to her*). Imogen darling, what's the matter? Something's upset you.

IMOGEN (*plaintively*). Joan dear, you do love me, don't you?

JOAN. I adore you. What's the matter?

IMOGEN. Would you go on loving me if I told you I was a little bit of a fraud?

JOAN. I should love you even more.

IMOGEN. Thank you, dear. (*Hesitating.*) I've got a confession to make.

JOAN. To me?

IMOGEN. Yes.

JOAN. How sweet of you! (*She draws up FREDDIE'S chair to IMOGEN, and sits.*)

IMOGEN. I can't think of anybody else.

JOAN (*a little dashed*). I see.

(Enter FREDDIE, R.)

FREDDIE. Who do you think is on the telephone?

IMOGEN. Please don't ask me to guess things, Freddie; you know I can't do it. Who?

FREDDIE. Eric.

IMOGEN (*rising quickly*). Eric! Eric Richmond?

FREDDIE. Yes. He came home from Egypt last night. Not a word of warning to anybody, as usual. (*Indicating telephone.*) You're through.

IMOGEN (*hurrying to the telephone, on the bureau down R.*) Hallo! Eric, my dear! Why didn't you let me know you were coming? Where are you, and how are you? Turf Club? . . . What? . . . Eric, who cares whether you're starting your usual attack of hay fever? Come here at once; I want you. Fly! Take a taxi! Run! (*Putting down the receiver.*) Oh! (*She sits at the bureau, smiling eagerly.*)

FREDDIE. What's the matter with Imogen?

JOAN. Get out, and leave us. She wants to talk to me about something. (*She pushes FREDDIE R.*)

FREDDIE. Oh, but I—

JOAN. Scram, child!

(FREDDIE goes reluctantly R. towards the door.)

(*Coming down C., reassuringly, to IMOGEN.*) Freddie's going now, dear.

IMOGEN (*vaguely*). Why?

JOAN. I thought you wanted to tell me something.

IMOGEN (*rising*). That's all right, dear, thank you. I needn't worry you now. Eric's coming.

JOAN (*disappointed*). Oh! All right—I'll clear out. (*She goes L.*)

IMOGEN. No! Stay! (*Agitatedly.*) I mustn't be left till Eric comes! (*Going after JOAN and bringing her back. Standing C., dramatically.*) Do you know that woman practically threatened me?

FREDDIE. What with? Assault? (*Professionally, sitting down at R. end of table.*) Tell me your story, in your own words.

JOAN. Oh, shut up, Freddie!

IMOGEN. She's sending a card over, for her party to-night. She as good as told me that if I didn't come, I'd suffer for it.

FREDDIE (*nodding*). Blackmail! Continue your evidence, taking your own time.

JOAN. Imogen, don't say that Rose Torrent has got something on you! (*IMOGEN nods her head.*) Oh!

IMOGEN. Joan dear—

JOAN. Yes?

IMOGEN. Do you think Eric is the sort of man who would take a confession in the right spirit?

JOAN. That would depend on what sort of confession it was, darling. Supposing you tell me—

FREDDIE (*reprovingly*). Us!

IMOGEN. No. I'm afraid you're too young, both of you.

FREDDIE (*crossing below IMOGEN to JOAN*). Imogen, the only people left in the world to-day with any worldly wisdom at all are the young! I mean (*putting his arm round JOAN*) look at Joan and me—and then look at our present Government!

CHARLES (*appearing at the door R.*). Mr. Richmond.

(*Enter ERIC. CHARLES goes out.*)

ERIC. Hallo, Imogen! (*He shakes hands solemnly with IMOGEN, who has run to meet him.*) Good morning! Nice day, isn't it? (*He crosses below IMOGEN.*) Hallo, you two!

FREDDIE. } Hallo!
JOAN. }

JOAN. How are all the mummies?

ERIC. Not so dusty.

(*He realizes that he has made a joke and laughs; so do FREDDIE and JOAN.*)

IMOGEN. Eric dear, please, please don't stand there making jokes about mummies! I want to talk to you. Joan darling, take Freddie away somewhere.

(*JOAN turns to FREDDIE inquiringly.*)

FREDDIE. In camera? Oke! Women, children, and all decently minded men will now leave the court. Come, Joan.

(*They go off L. IMOGEN and ERIC stand face to face. She looks up at him appealingly. He suddenly produces a handkerchief, and sneezes, with his back to the audience.*)

ERIC (*composedly, putting his handkerchief away*). Now!

IMOGEN. Eric, why must you go away for years?

ERIC. Eight months.

IMOGEN. For years and years—leaving all sorts of awful things to happen to me?

ERIC. What has happened, Imogen?

IMOGEN. It's going to be very difficult. Just sit down over there (*she points L.*), and look straight in front of you.

(*She leads ERIC up to the armchair L. Having seated himself, he suppresses another sneeze.*)

And if you can possibly manage it, don't sneeze any more at present: I don't think I could bear it again. Eric, why do people insist on putting me on a pedestal? (*She moves away from ERIC, down C.*)

ERIC (*gruffly*). Because you're an angel.

IMOGEN. No, I'm not; and I never was. And I've fallen off my pedestal, anyhow: I'm lying mangled on the pavement below.

ERIC. "Shattered" would be more correct.

IMOGEN. Eric—please!

ERIC. Sorry! Shoot ahead!

IMOGEN (*tragically*). Mangled on the pavement below, utterly solitary and forsaken—like—who was it they threw down on to a pavement?

ERIC. Jezebel.

IMOGEN. No, dear; I don't mean her at all. (*Sitting L. end of table.*) Perhaps I don't mean thrown down, either: perhaps I just mean utterly alone, and remote, and friendless, like——

ERIC. Robinson Crusoe?

IMOGEN (*uncertainly*). Yes.

ERIC (*cheerfully*). Well, my name's Friday. (*He rises and stands with back to fire.*)

IMOGEN. What, dear?

ERIC (*patiently*). It doesn't signify! Shoot ahead.

IMOGEN. Thank you. You won't say "Shoot ahead" again, will you?

ERIC. All right. Resume. Who pushed you off the pedestal?

IMOGEN. Do you know Mrs. John Torrent?

ERIC. Yes. Antibes. A white woman. Surely she didn't do it?

IMOGEN. No. She merely found me lying mangled on the pavement.

ERIC. Then who did?

IMOGEN. Eric, please don't ask direct questions! Let me tell this story in my own way.

ERIC. Sorry. Shoot—— (*He pulls out his handkerchief and stops a sneeze with it.*)

IMOGEN. Do you remember a man called Chepstow—Ronald Chepstow?

ERIC. That roaring cad? I should say so! (*He comes a step nearer.*) Imogen, what are you trying to tell me?

IMOGEN (*rather defiantly*). He may have been a roaring cad—but he was the only one of the whole lot of you who knew how to treat me as I wanted to be treated.

ERIC. And how did you want to be treated?

IMOGEN. Like a milliner's apprentice. (*Defiantly.*) There!

ERIC. Oh! (*Thoughtfully.*) How does one treat a milliner's apprentice? Slap and tickle, and so forth?

IMOGEN. More or less. He was the only one of you who understood me—who realized that under all my——

ERIC (*advancing another step*). Imogen, would you mind coming to the point?

IMOGEN. Very well, dear. It was last August—three days after I got back from Antibes. Joan was away on a holiday: most of the servants had gone on ahead to Scotland: I was going there myself presently. Chepstow rang me up.

ERIC. And asked if you would lunch with him.

IMOGEN. No; that's just what he didn't do.

ERIC. Sorry!

IMOGEN. He told me I was going to lunch with him.

ERIC. Damn his impudence!

IMOGEN. That's where you're wrong. That's where all of you were wrong. He knew what he wanted—and he knew what I wanted.

ERIC. Rough stuff—I see. (*He goes to chair above table on IMOGEN'S R., and sits. He fills his pipe, etc.*) All right, you lunched. And then?

IMOGEN. He asked me if I'd ever seen Margate.

ERIC. Margate!

IMOGEN. Yes. He said he thought it was the sort of place that would appeal to me.

ERIC. Had you seen it?

IMOGEN. No, of course I hadn't; but I suddenly felt I should love to. So we went there directly after lunch.

ERIC. His car or yours?

IMOGEN. Car? With a chauffeur looking down his nose all the time? No! We went by train—an excursion train—in a third-class carriage with twelve people in it. (*Beginning rather to enjoy her own narrative.*) There was a family of six, and two sets of lovers, and us. The lovers sat on each other's knees, and that made it possible for all the rest of us to find seats. There was a baby, too. Poor little mite, it had—

ERIC. I will take the baby's infirmities as read. And when you got to Margate you drove to the Cliftonville?

IMOGEN. What's that?

ERIC. The local Ritz.

IMOGEN. Oh, no! That wasn't what Chepstow and I had come to Margate for. It was to be thoroughly common.

ERIC. And how did you set about that?

IMOGEN. We followed the family of six. Wasn't that a clever idea? I thought of it. First of all they went into a shop, with a great big board outside. It said: "Have You Got Your Rock?"

ERIC. And they got their rock?

IMOGEN. Yes—all except the baby. You see, it had—

ERIC. Did you get yours?

IMOGEN. Oh, yes. It was lovely sticky pink stuff, with Margate inside.

ERIC. Inside?

IMOGEN. Yes. You never got away from it: wherever you bit, there it was—Margate! Wasn't that clever?

ERIC. Where did you eat it?

IMOGEN. On the beach.

ERIC. With the family of six.

IMOGEN. No; just behind them. When we'd finished, we went to a sort of Fun City—Scenic Railways, and Over The Falls, and things like that. Have you ever been Over The Falls? It's rather

embarrassing the first time, but one gets used to it. Then the Virginia Reel—that's a sort of big whirling tub, full of people. First it whirls one way and then the other, and you hang round people's necks to avoid being whirled out.

ERIC. Chepstow's neck, I presume?

IMOGEN. At first, yes; but later on I was thankful to get hold of simply anybody's, my dear!

ERIC (*thoughtfully*). The Duchess of Rye! And after that, I presume you ate cockles?

IMOGEN. No. I meant to, but by that time I was feeling rather sick.

ERIC. The Virginia Reel, I suppose?

IMOGEN. Yes. So we went and listened to some pierrots. We'd lost the family of six by this time, of course.

ERIC. I'm not surprised. Then?

IMOGEN. Then—we went for a tram ride.

ERIC (*rising and standing R. of her, pipe in mouth*). Imogen, you are deliberately trying to put off telling me something.

IMOGEN. Yes, dear, I know. I'm coming to it, though. After the tram ride we went for a little walk. Presently we noticed a little temperance hotel, with a great big board up.

ERIC. Another big board?

IMOGEN. Yes. Only this one said: Teas, Dinners, Beds. Just like that. Teas, Dinners, Beds! We were rather puzzled.

ERIC. Why?

IMOGEN. Well, as Chepstow said to me: "Don't they serve breakfast?"

ERIC (*after surveying her for some time*). And did they?

IMOGEN (*gently*). Yes. (*A pause: then with a reminiscent smile.*) I had ham and eggs.

ERIC (*looking at her intently*). And what did Chepstow have?

IMOGEN. I don't know, dear. I mean, how could I?

ERIC. You didn't breakfast together?

IMOGEN (*shocked*). Eric—I was in bed! With the door locked!

ERIC. Had it been locked all night?

IMOGEN. In a temperance hotel, at Margate? I should *think* so!

ERIC. Did you hear anybody trying the handle?

IMOGEN. I rather think I did hear something—just before I dropped off.

ERIC. And what did you do?

IMOGEN. I dropped off, dear!

ERIC. And you never saw Chepstow till next morning?

IMOGEN. Of course not. And a nice temper he was in when I did see him: I don't know why. Anyhow, I was so glad to get home again.

ERIC. And have you seen him since?

IMOGEN. No, dear.

ERIC. And never will?

IMOGEN. And never will.

ERIC. *Fini—ch?* (*She nods.*) Good! (*He moves L., and suddenly turns.*) By the way—any correspondence? (*She nods. Frantically.*) Oh, my—!

IMOGEN. Please don't storm at me, Eric. After all, I had to write him one tiny bread-and-butter letter—

ERIC. Ham-and-egg letter!

IMOGEN. Just to thank him for a nice time—(*plaintively*) hadn't I?

ERIC. How did you sign it?

IMOGEN (*rather sentimentally*). "Your little Ginny." (*He makes a strangled noise.*) I don't see why you should make noises like that, Eric. After all, it was your fault, wasn't it?—leaving me all alone in London—in August, too!

ERIC. How long did this correspondence continue?

IMOGEN. Well, he acknowledged my letter, and—

ERIC (*standing over her*). How many more did you write to him?

IMOGEN. I'm not deaf, dear. Two.

ERIC. Three altogether?

IMOGEN. Yes.

ERIC. You must have been out of your mind!

IMOGEN. I'm sure I was, dear. But I soon got into it again, after a few days in Scotland.

ERIC (*approvingly*). Scotland has its points.

IMOGEN. And then I realized, of course, that I must get the letters back.

ERIC. Scotland for ever! What did you do?

IMOGEN. As soon as I got home in October I rang up Chepstow and asked for them.

ERIC. What did he reply to that?

IMOGEN. He said he wasn't quite sure if he'd kept them. Wasn't that a horrible thing to say?

ERIC. The man's a cad!

IMOGEN. However, presently he remembered that he had left them in a drawer in his desk. He said he'd go and make sure that they were all right.

ERIC. And were they?

IMOGEN. No. They were gone. They'd been stolen.

ERIC. Stolen?

IMOGEN. Yes.

ERIC. But why was he so certain?

IMOGEN. He'd had to get rid of his manservant—a man called Eaves. He'd been missing small sums of money for some time, out of that very desk.

ERIC. Let me tell you something. Mr. Eaves has got those letters.

IMOGEN. No, he hasn't.

ERIC. Then who has?

IMOGEN. Mrs. Torrent. (*She rises and goes R.*)

ERIC. Mrs. Torrent?

IMOGEN. Yes. Eaves is now her butler.

ERIC. But Mrs. Torrent would never take a butler if he hadn't a reference from his last place.

IMOGEN (*almost tearfully*). He had three—my letters!

ERIC. You mean he's given them to her?

IMOGEN. Sold them, more likely. Anyhow, she's got them. And she's just been in here, to say that I can't have them back unless I go to her party to-night!

ERIC. She said that?

IMOGEN. Well, not in so many words. There's to be a cotillion—and presents—and there's a very special present for me.

ERIC (*rising*). Then that's all right.

IMOGEN. What do you mean, Eric?

ERIC. Well, all you have to do is to go to the party, and get your present.

IMOGEN (*reproachfully*). Oh, Eric! And I thought you were my friend! (*She goes up R.*)

ERIC. Don't you want to go to the party?

IMOGEN (*R. of table*). I'd rather die!

ERIC. Why shouldn't you go? In a way, it's only fair. From all I hear, you've been making use of her, like everyone else in London.

IMOGEN. Now you're going to be impartial. How like a man! Oh, Eric! (*She sits R. end of table.*)

ERIC (*hastily, going and standing above her*). All right, dear: don't let's argue. You won't go—that's settled. Now, we must think of some other way of getting them back. How about consulting a clever lawyer?

IMOGEN. But that would mean telling him about them. "Your little Ginny." I couldn't!

ERIC. You needn't tell him what's inside them. I know—why not ask young Freddie? He can tell you how these things are worked. (*He goes L. and calls.*) Freddie!

FREDDIE'S VOICE. Hallo!

ERIC. We want you.

(*Enter FREDDIE.*)

FREDDIE. I thought you would.

ERIC (*returning*). After all, Freddie's more or less one of the family.

JOAN (*peeping out after FREDDIE*). Me too?

IMOGEN (*resignedly*). I suppose so, dear. Tell them—something, Eric.

(*ERIC is above the table. IMOGEN is still sitting R. FREDDIE and JOAN stand L. of ERIC.*)

ERIC (*choosing his words carefully*). Listen, you two! Imogen, when she was very much younger than she is now, once wrote two or three letters to—someone.

FREDDIE (*turning to JOAN*). Golly!

ERIC. I should add, they were indiscreet. Well, they've turned up again—and Mrs. John Torrent has got them.

JOAN. So that's why Imogen has got to go to the party to-night.

ERIC (*firmly*). That is why Imogen is *not* going to the party to-night! I cannot allow her to be subjected to such humiliation.

(*He goes to IMOGEN. FREDDIE turns to JOAN and strikes an heroic attitude.*)

IMOGEN (*tearfully*). Bless you, Eric dear!

ERIC (*glancing up at portrait*). Now that poor Willie is no longer here to advise her—

(*JOAN and FREDDIE look up at the portrait and groan. ERIC decides not to continue in this strain.*)

Anyhow, we've all got to put on our thinking-caps.

FREDDIE. And turn down the brims!

ERIC. I thought you might be able to tell us of some clever lawyer fellow who could arrange the matter for us.

FREDDIE (*shaking his head*). Not a hope!

IMOGEN (*with a faint moan*). Oh!

ERIC. What do you mean?

JOAN. He's pro-Torrent, that's what he is.

FREDDIE. I'm nothing of the kind, except to this extent, that I've a profound respect for Rose Torrent as an opponent. A lawyer could only get these letters for you by buying them back from her—and do you think she would take a million for them? Not on your life! What she wants, and all she wants, is Imogen cold on a plate. Am I right?

JOAN. For once, dear. Now listen to my plan. What about hiring a good reliable burglar?

FREDDIE. Burglar? I don't think I ought to listen to this.

JOAN. Don't be silly! It isn't a crime to steal one's own property. It would be quite simple, too, since we live next door. (*She goes up to the L. window, and on to the balcony.*) He could start from here—this very room. He could climb on to the end of this balcony, and jump across to the Torrents' balcony. It's not very far—only a few yards. Of course, we'd get a cat burglar. Come and look, Freddie. (*FREDDIE goes up and joins her.*) Couldn't that be jumped?

FREDDIE. It's not impossible. He'd find some nasty spiky railings underneath, if he missed.

JOAN. My dear, we'd insure his life, naturally. (*She comes down.*)

FREDDIE (*looking over the balcony*). Hallo! Look out!

JOAN (*going up to him*). What's the matter?

FREDDIE. There's someone coming out of Mrs. Torrent's front door.

JOAN. It's your friend Eaves. Keep back! He mustn't overhear our plans.

IMOGEN (*up at R. window*). Eaves! That's the very man!

ERIC. Let me go down and wring his neck!

IMOGEN. Not in Grosvenor Square, dear.

ERIC. I beg your pardon.

FREDDIE. Hallo, he's coming here! He's rung the bell.

JOAN (*re-entering from L. of balcony*). A caller for you, Imogen. Our Mr. Eaves from next door. (*She goes out again by C. window.*)

IMOGEN. He's bringing that invitation card! (*To ERIC.*) You see, she's pretty sure of me!

ERIC (*quickly*). Run down, Freddie old man, and tell Charles to bring that man up here.

FREDDIE. Why?

ERIC. Never mind. Run, or he'll be gone.

(*JOAN comes in from balcony.*)

JOAN. I'll go.

(*She runs out R.*)

IMOGEN. Eric, what are you going to do?

FREDDIE (*L. of table*). As her legal adviser, and nearest relation, I *must* be informed—

ERIC (*above table*). Listen to me! This man Eaves is a first-class crook: he steals moneys and he steals letters. According to you, he also sells letters. I am going to have him up here and explain to him that we have found him out. I'm going to put the fear of death into him. I shall have to bluff a bit, of course—

IMOGEN. Oh, Eric, you're wonderful!

FREDDIE (*leading ERIC R.*). Eric, old man, don't you think I'd better handle this? Of course, I'm sure you'd be more than a match for a whole platoon of resurrected Pharaohs, but well, after all, this is England; and a certain knowledge of English law is—I mean, I know exactly how far to go with the fellow—

ERIC (*firmly*). Freddie, this is my job.

FREDDIE (*sulkily*). All right. Don't blame me if you make a mess of it. (*He goes up to the window.*)

ERIC (*who has gone R. to IMOGEN below table*). Imogen, I don't think you'd better be present at this interview. I may have to take a rather strong line with this scoundrel: there may be a painful scene.

(*ERIC leads her L.*)

IMOGEN. I'll go. But be as quick as you can, dear. I don't think I could bear the suspense for more than about five minutes.

ERIC (*solemnly*). Be brave, Imogen. (*Indicating the portrait.*) Think of Willie!

(*IMOGEN gives a little wail, and goes out R.*)

(*After a moment enter JOAN, R.*)

JOAN. Come in here, please.

(*Enter EAVES. He looks round, sees ERIC, and bows respectfully.*)

ERIC (*putting on a fierce voice*). Good morning! I want to speak to you, my man.

EAVES. With pleasure, sir.

ERIC (*indicating door R.*). Joan, Imogen is out there.

JOAN. I see.

ERIC. Will you go and join her?

JOAN. No fear!

ERIC. This is a job for competent men.

JOAN (*sitting down above table*). As long as they are competent, I won't say a word. Carry on, Sergeant-Major!

ERIC. Your place is with Imogen.

JOAN. Righto! Here she is!

(*Enter IMOGEN, L.*)

IMOGEN. Eric darling, I've decided that I can't bear it in there even for five minutes. I'll sit here, with Joan. Joan dear!

ERIC (*crossly*). Oh, very well!

(*IMOGEN sits in the armchair L., with JOAN on the arm. ERIC is at L. end of table, EAVES at R., FREDDIE up by window.*)

Your name is Eaves?

EAVES. It is, sir. Thank you.

ERIC. I want to speak to you, and I am going to speak very plainly—in a manner you cannot possibly understand—I should say misunderstand!

EAVES. I thank you, sir.

ERIC. Er—some—certain—rather valuable little—articles—have been—shall we say?—mis-laid.

EAVES. I am extremely sorry to hear it, sir.

ERIC. Of course, it would be possible to offer a reward for their recovery. On the other hand, we might go to the Police. Which course would you recommend?

EAVES. It is always better, I think, sir, to go to the Police.

(*JOAN giggles.*)

ERIC (*suddenly losing his temper*). Damn it all, don't be impertinent! You know you stole them; and you stand there—

JOAN. For Heaven's sake— (She leads ERIC down L. to the stool, and seats him on it, with his face to the audience.) Freddie, you shall try.

FREDDIE (*coming down from the window*). I was only waiting. (*Soothingly, to ERIC.*) She's quite right, old man. This wants a

little more *savoir faire* than you've got. Nobody's blaming you, but you simply haven't got it. You'd better leave things to me: I'm sure you'll be the first to thank me afterwards. (*He goes to L. end of table.*) I ought first to explain to you, Mr. Eaves, that Mr. Richmond is one of our Silent Empire Builders—one of our Great Outdoor Men. He spends much of his life digging—

EAVES (*respectfully*). Very healthy, sir, I understand.

FREDDIE. Digging for Pharaohs in the Garden of the Past.

EAVES (*resignedly*). Yes, sir.

FREDDIE. I tell you this in order to bring home to you the fact that you are now dealing with a man of a very different calibre—an experienced lawyer. (*He goes to the chair L. of table and puts his foot on it; then continues impressively.*) I suggest that you are in a position to furnish us with certain information as to the whereabouts of certain documents. What I want—what I demand, Mr. Eaves—is restitution. (*He points his finger impressively.* EAVES *shakes his head in polite bewilderment.*) Do not trifle with me, sir! You have no option—no alternative—but to tell the whole truth. His Majesty's Judges are determined, by exemplary sentences—

(*JOAN and IMOGEN rise simultaneously. JOAN pats FREDDIE on the shoulder: IMOGEN takes his pencil away from him. He breaks off, much annoyed.*)

I say! What are you doing?

IMOGEN. Joan darling, put Freddie somewhere too, will you?

I want to talk to Mr. Eaves.

FREDDIE (*indignantly*). Yes, but I say—

JOAN. Mother knows best, dear. (*She takes him to the armchair L., and sits by him.*)

IMOGEN (*at L. end of table*). Now, Eaves.

EAVES. Yes, your Grace?

IMOGEN. How much have you understood of what these gentlemen have been trying to say to you?

EAVES. Nothing whatever, I fear, your Grace.

IMOGEN. Think again, Eaves. They didn't do it very cleverly, I'll admit, but I've a feeling that you've a sort of inkling of what they were driving at. (*She smiles.*) Now haven't you?

EAVES (*with a slight grin*). Perhaps, your Grace. Perhaps not. I've a motto:—No admissions—except on business!

IMOGEN (*smiling*). And business it is, Mr. Eaves. Won't you sit down?

EAVES. Thank you, your Grace.

(*Both sit below table.*)

IMOGEN. It all boils down really to a choice—for you—between—shall we say?—Captain Much and Major More. Captain Much and Major More! Do you follow me?

EAVES. I begin to, your Grace.

IMOGEN. Captain Much lives next door. Captain Much, I take it, has already done his bit—her bit.

EAVES. I don't say no, your Grace.

IMOGEN. Now you're in the presence of Major More.

EAVES. I follow you, your Grace.

IMOGEN. Major More—perhaps a good deal More. (*They look at one another steadily.*) On delivery of the documents, of course.

EAVES. I'm sorry, your Grace—no! I could not risk delivery. The documents must be—collected. All I could do would be to supply information as to present whereabouts. The rest is up to—the collector.

IMOGEN. I see. And when do you think would be a good time to collect?

EAVES. May I suggest this evening, your Grace—in the course of the festivities?

IMOGEN. Quite.

FREDDIE (*rising*). I cannot condone Conspiracy.

IMOGEN (*pathetically*). Joan darling!

JOAN (*to FREDDIE*). Shut up! (*She pulls him down.*)

IMOGEN. Please go on, Mr. Eaves.

EAVES. I think I might even go so far as to guarantee freedom from interruption during—the necessary period. That is, supposing we agree as to terms.

IMOGEN. Quite. What are your ideas as to terms?

EAVES. Well, your Grace, I have long been anxious to get out of Service——

IMOGEN. I see. And buy a little public-house somewhere? Isn't that what people do?

EAVES. That was the intention.

IMOGEN. What do little public-houses cost?

EAVES. I should like to hear your Grace's estimate of that.

(IMOGEN takes up a pad, scribbles a figure on it, and hands it to EAVES. He reads it, crosses out IMOGEN's figure, and writes another underneath. He passes the pad back to IMOGEN. She reads it, thinks again, crosses out EAVES' figure and writes another. She hands the pad back to EAVES. This time he nods, tears off the sheet, folds it up and puts it into his pocket. Both bow to one another; then EAVES picks up his hat and rises.)

I thank your Grace. (*He goes to the door R.*)

IMOGEN. I shall expect to see you here to-morrow morning, if all goes well.

EAVES (*with his hand on the door handle, turning*). Naturally, your Grace.

IMOGEN. By the way, there are three—of what I want. Two would be of no value.

EAVES. That is quite understood, your Grace. I wish your Grace good morning—and the best of luck to all of us!

(He sidles out, closing the door behind him.)

ERIC *(rising and going to IMOGEN)*. Well done, Imogen! Damned good!

IMOGEN *(to ERIC)*. Did I really do it well, Eric? It was my first attempt at that sort of thing.

ERIC. Well? I couldn't have done it any better myself!

IMOGEN. Oh, darling!

ERIC. There was only one detail that wasn't quite clear to me. Apparently someone is to go next door during the show to-night and collect these letters.

IMOGEN. Yes, dear; that's right.

ERIC. Well, who is your collector—your emissary?

IMOGEN *(as if surprised)*. You, darling. Who else?

ERIC *(completely staggered)*. But, Imogen—I—me?

IMOGEN *(gently, rising)*. I know what's bothering you, dear. Don't worry the old head about it. You haven't had any invitation, have you? We'll soon settle that. What's the number, Joanny dear? *(She goes to telephone, on bureau down R.)*

JOAN. Mayfair two-nine-one-two.

IMOGEN. Thank you, dear. *(She begins to dial.)*

ERIC. Imogen, I simply cannot—

IMOGEN. Don't talk so loud, darling, please! You're confusing me! Ask for Mrs. John Torrent. Say you have just returned from Egypt, and how is she, and when may you call on her? That ought to be sufficient. *(To JOAN.)* Don't you think so, Joanny? *(She continues to dial.)*

(JOAN is now above the table, FREDDIE by the fire, ERIC down C.)

JOAN. Quite. Mrs. Torrent always had a slight crush on Eric, anyway.

ERIC *(bewildered)*. I say, what is all this about? *(He crosses to IMOGEN.)*

IMOGEN *(handing receiver. By this time she has dialled)*. Take this, dear.

ERIC. I refuse—absolutely!

IMOGEN. Oh, Eric! Speak to him, Freddie.

FREDDIE. Don't stand there looking like the Metro-Goldwyn lion, old boy! Do what you're told!

ERIC. But, Imogen— *(He is now holding the receiver. IMOGEN stands L. of him.)*

IMOGEN. Hush!

(She indicates the telephone receiver. ERIC puts it to his ear and finds someone is speaking.)

ERIC *(mechanically)*. Hallo! Yes. What? *(IMOGEN instructs him by silently working her lips.)* Is that Mrs. Torrent's house? *(IMOGEN continues her instructions.)* Could I speak to Mrs. Torrent

for a moment? Mr. Eric Richmond. What? You'll put me through? Thank you. (*He puts his hand over the mouthpiece. To IMOGEN.*) Now, look here— (*The receiver gives a prolonged buzz.*)

JOAN. Look out! You're through! (*She has a sudden inspiration. She comes below table and scribbles on a pad.*)

ERIC. Hallo!, Mrs. Torrent? How are you? What? It's Eric Richmond. (*With a nervous laugh.*) Yes, it really is. What? Oh, only last night. I never warn anybody: I just arrive. (*Another nervous laugh.*) What? Oh, I'm speaking from—

(*JOAN hurries to IMOGEN with the pad. IMOGEN, after a glance at it, holds it in front of ERIC. He squints at it: it is too close: he pushes it farther away.*)

—from the Turf Club! Yes, Turf Club! (*IMOGEN points to the pad again. He is now reading from it.*) I'm just ringing up a few old friends. I suppose you are as busy as usual. . . . What? Are you really? To-night? (*Another nervous laugh.*) It sounds like a grand affair. . . . What? Oh, Mrs. Torrent—this is too kind of you! (*JOAN and IMOGEN give way to violent manifestations of joy.*) I couldn't—really! I'm imposing on your hospitality! (*JOAN and IMOGEN make furious faces at him.*) Well, if you really mean it, I should love to come. (*Another nervous laugh.*) Great pleasure! Thank you! What? You'll send the invitation card to the Club? (*Nodding.*) Thank you. *Au revoir!* (*He hangs up, and looks round with a dazed expression.*)

(*IMOGEN throws the pad in the air: she and JOAN dance round together.*)

JOAN } (*triumphantly*). We've done it! We've done it! Oh,
IMOGEN } Eric, you were marvellous! *etc.*

FREDDIE (*shouting them down*). Stop! Wait! It was too easy! It was too damned easy! There's a catch about it!

JOAN. }
IMOGEN. } What do you mean?

FREDDIE. We'll never be able to get away with this!

JOAN. }
IMOGEN. } Why not?

FREDDIE (*looking up at the portrait*). I don't like the look on Willie's face!

(*All turn and look, startled.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE 1

SCENE.—*The same, except that the refectory table has disappeared. There is now a sofa R.C. L.C., instead of the armchair and stool, there is a small table, with the armchair to the R. of it. There is room for someone to stand between the table and the fire.*

It is about 11.30 the same evening. The big windows are wide open, and it is possible to hear the guests arriving for the party next door. Motor horns; the occasional racing of an engine; banging of car doors.

JOAN is at the bureau down R., writing. FREDDIE is out on the balcony, watching the arrivals. Both are in evening dress.

FREDDIE. Hallo, there's General Maynard.

JOAN (*without looking up*). Is his wife with him?

FREDDIE. Wait a minute: yes.

JOAN. That'll tarnish his evening a bit. Anybody else we know?

(A long, low note here.)

FREDDIE. Here's a Rolls disgorging. No, I don't recognize this lot. Stout papa, corpulent mamma, fair daughter, definitely awful son.

JOAN. Boyhood friends of Mr. Torrent, with offspring, I fancy. Who else?

FREDDIE. Daimler.

JOAN. Who?

FREDDIE. Daimler—containing Oriental potentate of some kind, covered in diamonds. Well, the Flamborough Pearls will stand up to *them*! (*Sound of an open exhaust.*) Bentley, sports model—containing three lovelies and a young man with no chin. Why do they always have no chin? On foot—the aged and parsimonious Earl of Polperro, a faint but persistent noise in the Foreign Office. (*Bulb horn here.*) Taxi. Ibbetson, Editor of the *Intellectual Review*, accompanied by hairy man in slouch hat: I think it's Rumbelow, the new comic sculptor: he's a feather in any hostess's cap. (*Noise of hoofs.*) A brougham—yes, actually a brougham! Can it be? It is—old Lady Perivale, sidespring boots and all! She doesn't go everywhere she's asked, either! That seems to be all for the present. (*Coming into room.*) Do you know, Joan, Imogen could almost have gone to this party. I haven't seen a single free-fooder go in yet.

JOAN. Has Brother Sam arrived?

FREDDIE. I haven't noticed him, but you can bet he's there all right. We'll ask Eric when he gets back.

JOAN. Poor old Eric! I wonder how he's getting on?

(Enter IMOGEN, R., in evening dress and wrap. She hurries to C. window, and looks out. JOAN rises and goes to her and brings her down C.)

Imogen darling! Home already? It's not nearly twelve yet.

FREDDIE (L., severely). Didn't we send you out to spend a nice long evening with old Lady Dulworthy—with orders not to come home until you had established a good meaty *alibi*?

IMOGEN. I simply had to come home, dear. I'm too anxious about Eric.

FREDDIE. You didn't come in by the front door!

IMOGEN. No. I drove home in a taxi, and let myself in at the side entrance. Who on earth lit that fire?

FREDDIE. I did.

IMOGEN. In June? What for?

FREDDIE (at fire). As your legal adviser, I am taking no risks. Those letters must be cremated on arrival.

(CHARLES enters R.)

CHARLES. Mr. Richmond.

(He exits.)

(Enter ERIC, in evening dress. IMOGEN and JOAN wait until the doors are closed, then make a rush for ERIC. They bring him down C.)

JOAN. Have you got them?

IMOGEN. Eric, you were caught—red-handed!

ERIC. No—it's all right.

JOAN. } You've got them!

IMOGEN. }

(ERIC nods.)

FREDDIE. I can accept no responsibility for this.

(The two girls wave to him to be quiet.)

IMOGEN. Where are they, Eric dear?

ERIC. Just one moment. (He comes down stage, unfastens his waistcoat, takes the box out of the top of his trousers, then hands it to IMOGEN on his L. It is tied up in white paper, with ribbon.) This sort of thing ruins a man's figure!

IMOGEN (seizing the package). Oh! (She begins to fumble at the ribbon.)

FREDDIE. I'd better do that, Imogen: women are hopeless at knots. (He takes the package from her. She snatches it back.)

IMOGEN. No, Freddie ; it's my parcel ! (*She hurries to the sofa R., followed by FREDDIE.*)

JOAN (*rushing R. to the bureau, and getting scissors*). Here—scissors ! scissors !

(*By this time JOAN, IMOGEN, and FREDDIE are sitting on the sofa, babbling hard. ERIC is standing at the back. Finally JOAN cuts the ribbon.*)

IMOGEN. Bless you, darling !

(*She tears open the paper. The others watch her eagerly. Presently the box is revealed. It is a trumpery affair, ornamented with shells.*)

IMOGEN holds it up.)

There !

JOAN. What a common box !

FREDDIE (*taking it, and examining it*). Photograph of considerable seaside resort on lid. What is this place ? (*Reads.*) "A Present from Margate." Why Margate ?

IMOGEN (*snatching it from him again*). Never mind ! How can we open it ? It's locked. There ought to be a key. Where is the key ?

ERIC (*reaching over and taking the box*). We needn't worry about the key.

(*He goes over to back of table L. JOAN runs after him, followed by IMOGEN. JOAN goes L. of him.*)

FREDDIE (*on the sofa*). I say, couldn't we keep this box in one place for a bit ? I mean——

(*He rises, IMOGEN hands him her wrap, and goes R. of ERIC. FREDDIE leaves the wrap on the sofa, and goes above table to fire.*)

Meanwhile ERIC has laid the box on the table and prised the lid open with the scissors. JOAN and IMOGEN are both talking hard.)

ERIC. There we are !

FREDDIE. So help me, he's got 'em !

IMOGEN. } Oh !
JOAN. }

ERIC (*handing three letters out, one by one, to IMOGEN*). One, two, three !

(*IMOGEN seizes them and runs C. with them. She glances through them quickly, one by one.*)

Envelopes and all ! (*He follows with the envelopes.*)

IMOGEN (*dropping the letters and throwing her arms round ERIC's neck*). Eric darling—darling !

(*JOAN throws her arms round FREDDIE.*)

ERIC. That's quite all right !

FREDDIE (*confidentially, to JOAN*). I think he'll have to marry her now.

ERIC. These don't look too tidy. (*He picks up the letters.*) What shall I do with them? Burn them?

IMOGEN. Yes, please, darling. Quick! And don't you dare to read them!

FREDDIE. This way to the Crematorium.

ERIC (*goes to the fire, and drops the letters in, one by one, followed by the envelopes*). One, two, three! There!

(*The fire flares up for a moment.*)

(*All give a sigh of relief.*)

FREDDIE (*to portrait*). Willie, old man, you were wrong. There was no catch about this.

JOAN (*taking up box*). What are we going to do with this box?

IMOGEN. Burn it too.

FREDDIE. Righto! (*Taking box and looking in.*) I say, does velvet burn, or just smell?

IMOGEN. What do you mean? Give it to me. (*FREDDIE does so. She pulls out a small square of black velvet.*) It's loose, anyhow. (*She has moved away from the table towards C. She now sees something in the box.*) Oh—oh!

JOAN (*running to R. of her*). Imogen darling, what's the matter? (*She looks into box.*) Oh!

ERIC (*coming to L. of IMOGEN*). What is all this? (*Looks into box.*) What on earth—?

(*He backs L. IMOGEN follows, and lays the box on the lower end of table. Then she slowly lifts out a large pearl necklace. There is a stunned silence.*)

What are these supposed to be for? Has she thrown them in as a makeweight?

IMOGEN. Makeweight? Do you know what these are?

(*FREDDIE comes R. of JOAN.*)

ERIC. What?

IMOGEN. The Flamborough Pearls! Mrs. Torrent's pearls. (*She drops them on the table.*)

JOAN (*incredulously*). But they're priceless!

IMOGEN. I know they are. What are they doing in this two-penny-halfpenny box? And who put them there?

FREDDIE (*to portrait*). You were right, Willie. There was a catch about this!

JOAN. Oh, shut up! This is serious.

ERIC. Serious? It's calamitous. Don't you see what it means?

IMOGEN. } What?

JOAN. }

(FREDDIE goes up, and comes down L. of ERIC.)

ERIC. It means that I set out to steal Imogen's letters, and I've damn well stolen the Flamborough Pearls as well!

IMOGEN. Eric, *darling*!

FREDDIE. Seven years!

IMOGEN. } Oh, shut up!

JOAN. }

ERIC (*ignoring them*). Let's think this out. It's a plot, of course—a trap—and we're in it.

(*He goes R. FREDDIE follows, C.*)

FREDDIE. We jolly well are—and we've got to get out. Let's sit down and be methodical. You here, Imogen; you go next her, Joan.

(IMOGEN and JOAN go and sit on sofa: IMOGEN is R. of JOAN: ERIC is R. of sofa.)

You, old boy, may remain exactly where you are. (*He goes back to table and takes up pearls and box.*) Exhibit A—Exhibit B! First, who put Exhibit A into Exhibit B? (*He returns L. of sofa, drops pearls into box, and shuts it.*)

JOAN. Mrs. Torrent.

FREDDIE. How do you know?

JOAN. Don't be an idiot, Freddie. Who else could it be?

FREDDIE. Why not Eaves, for instance?

JOAN. Why should Eaves?

FREDDIE (*coldly*). For the moment I can think of no reason why Eaves should, but we must leave no avenue unexplored.

IMOGEN. Freddie dear, I'm sure you're trying to help, but don't waste time drivelling, *please*!

FREDDIE (*indignantly*). Drivelling?

IMOGEN. Of course, Joan's perfectly right. It was Mrs. Torrent who put them in the box! I mean, it must have been, mustn't it?

FREDDIE (*resignedly*). All right—Mrs. Torrent put them in the box! Why?

JOAN. Because she had found us out.

FREDDIE. How?

ERIC. I expect Eaves gave the show away.

JOAN. Why should he? He'd everything to gain by keeping quiet. No, Mrs. Torrent found Eaves out.

FREDDIE. Again how?

JOAN. Perhaps she caught him planting the box—putting it where Eric would find it. Where did you find it, Eric?

ERIC (*deliberately*). In a drawer in a side-table in the morning-room on the first floor. (*Pointing.*) Just through there, it must be.

FREDDIE. How did you know where to look?

ERIC. Eaves tipped me the wink in the front hall, when I arrived.

JOAN. Had you much trouble in actually removing the goods?

ERIC. No: I found the room empty. I just took the box, buttoned it tight inside my——

IMOGEN. Yes, dear; we know. And then you came straight here?

ERIC. Certainly not! You can't walk into somebody's house and steal a thing and then walk right out again. It looks so rude. I stayed for another half-hour.

JOAN. What did you do to pass the time? Dance?

ERIC. No. I sat down as much as possible. (*Indicating his waist, then the box.*) You see——

ALL. Quite!

IMOGEN. Did you say good night to your hostess when you left, dear?

ERIC. I did. It seemed only civil.

FREDDIE. Did she say anything?

ERIC. Yes. She said she was looking forward to seeing me again quite soon.

JOAN. Repeat that!

ERIC. She said she was looking forward to seeing me again quite soon.

JOAN. Was she smiling when she said it?

ERIC. Purring would be nearer the mark.

JOAN. That settles it. She knew, of course!

(*FREDDIE goes L. to table and puts box down.*)

ERIC. Knew what?

JOAN. That you had the box on you.

ERIC. But—how did she know?

JOAN. That doesn't matter in the least. What does matter is that she could afford to let you leave the house with it.

ERIC. Why could she afford——?

JOAN. Because she had put something into the box which would bring you straight back again. Don't you see?

ERIC. No.

FREDDIE. I do. Cast your mind back to the book of Genesis, old man—or was it Exodus? Do you remember the story of Joseph's cup in Benjamin's sack? Well, Mrs. Torrent's Joseph, and you're little Benjamin. You've stolen the Flamborough Pearls——

ERIC. No, I haven't!

FREDDIE (*comes R. to sofa again*). Well, you've had them planted on you, which amounts to the same thing. What are you going to do with them—keep them?

ERIC (*severely*). Certainly not! What do you take me for? I shall return them, of course.

JOAN. How?

FREDDIE. Yes—how?

IMOGEN. Yes, darling. How?

ERIC (*goes L.*). I shall have to take them back myself, I suppose. I'll do it now: the longer I look at it the less I shall like it.

JOAN. You'll do no such thing.

ERIC. Why not?

JOAN. Because that's just what Mrs. Torrent means you to do. That's where the catch comes in. (*Rising and going to him.*) My dear boy, do you think it's going to be as easy for you to get these things into the house as it was to get them out of it?

FREDDIE (*putting JOAN back on sofa, then standing C.*). Joan's only a woman, old boy, but she's right.

ERIC. But who's going to prevent me?

FREDDIE. I imagine that extremely capable lady next door will have taken steps. I don't know what steps, but she will have taken them.

ERIC. Then I'll tell you what. I'll take these damned things home with me to-night, and send them to her in the morning—
anonymously.

FREDDIE. I said she was a capable lady. You wouldn't get home!

ERIC. Why not?

FREDDIE. You'd be arrested before you'd taken three steps down the street—on a charge of stealing the Flamborough Pearls. And you'd be found with the goods on you!

ERIC (*genuinely alarmed*). Oh, my G——! (*Sinks into armchair R. of table.*)

IMOGEN (*running to him*). Eric—darling! They shan't arrest you!

ERIC (*taking her in his arms*). But—good heavens!—I mean—what have I done to have all this shoved off on me? Can't we—
isn't there *any* way—

FREDDIE (*L. of table*). Of course there's a way. You can walk downstairs, out of this house, into the Torrents', and hang the pearls on the chandelier if you feel like it—so long as Imogen goes with you!

IMOGEN. I won't! I shan't! I can't!

JOAN. Of course she can't, Freddie, now! Don't rave! (*She takes IMOGEN from ERIC, and puts her on sofa.*) Poor darling!

ERIC (*severely*). Of course she can't, Freddie. I'm amazed at your suggesting such a thing! (*He goes to back of sofa, comforting IMOGEN.*)

FREDDIE. I never suggested anything. You asked for an alternative, and I gave you one, that's all. Of course I entirely agree with you: we can't take this thing lying down. Torrent must be beaten! Torrent must know she is beaten! Torrent must admit she is beaten! But there's no denying that for the moment we have our backs to the wall. To vary the metaphor, we have undoubtedly put Mrs. Torrent in a position to take a pot-

shot at Imogen and her pedestal—and poor old Eric here is the half-brick she proposes to employ.

ERIC (*coming c.*). What do you mean—*half-brick*?

FREDDIE (*going to him*). Well, old boy, there's no blinking the fact that you are now definitely of the Underworld—a blot on our well-ordered Social System—and if you're brought up at Marlborough Street to-morrow morning, as Mrs. Torrent intends you to be, Imogen—our aloof, exalted Imogen—immediately tumbles off her pedestal and takes rank as something technically known, in Chicago and elsewhere, as a Gunman's Moll. (*He passes below table, and gets L. of it again.*) And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the story of Mrs. Torrent's revenge!

IMOGEN (*to ERIC, who has gone to back of sofa*). Oh, Eric darling!

ERIC (*leaving IMOGEN and going R. of table, indignantly*). Freddie, will you please stop talking damned nonsense and frightening Imogen out of her wits?

FREDDIE. But I'm talking sense. Do you imagine that if you get caught, Imogen's name won't be mixed up in this business too? You took the stolen property to her house—you were seen emerging from the same premises——

ERIC. Freddie, I'm not going to get caught; and to prove my words I shall start for home now—and I bet you a fiver nobody lays a finger on me! (*He comes below table.*)

FREDDIE (*from balcony*). Nothing doing, old boy! I never bet on a certainty.

ERIC (*puzzled*). What do you mean? (*FREDDIE leads him up to c. window.*) What are you doing?

FREDDIE. Come up here for a moment. Do you see two rather sinister-looking blokes in bowler hats lurking on the other side of the road, against the railings of the Square garden?

ERIC. Yes.

FREDDIE. Do you know who they are?

ERIC. No.

FREDDIE. Plain-clothes men! Sleuths! And I fancy they're waiting for you.

(IMOGEN and JOAN have come up stage, between c. and R. windows. They clutch each other frantically.)

From where they stand they can command either front door. (*He comes down into the room, bringing ERIC.*) I don't like to look on the gloomy side, old boy, but I can't help feeling that the jaws of the trap are about to close.

(IMOGEN runs to ERIC; FREDDIE has gone back to the fire; JOAN is back of sofa.)

IMOGEN. Darling, I won't let you risk it!

ERIC (c., after thinking). I'm not going to risk it.

ALL. What?

ERIC. I've just thought of something. Look here! (*He goes up to the window c. with IMOGEN.*) That balcony into the morning-room. If I can get to it I needn't risk the front door at all. (*Pointing.*) Window—see?

IMOGEN. But how are you going to get to it, darling?

ERIC. I'm going to jump—from one balcony to another. It's only a matter of a few feet.

(*He comes above table, takes up the pearls, and puts them in his pocket.*

IMOGEN follows him.)

JOAN. But I thought of that only this morning! It's my idea!

FREDDIE. My good woman, what on earth does it matter whose idea it is, so long as it is properly carried out—by old Eric?

IMOGEN. No, no, Eric darling. Not by you! You'll be killed! Won't he be killed, Freddie?

FREDDIE (*judicially*). Not if he jumps far enough. If he fails to do so, I feel bound to admit that he will have to choose between some spiky railings and a deep area.

ERIC. Don't talk like a chump, Freddie! I once jumped nineteen feet six!

JOAN. Up or down, darling?

FREDDIE. But not, I imagine, in immaculate evening dress and from a standing take-off. However, it's your funeral, not mine.

(*He hands the piece of black velvet from the box to ERIC. ERIC throws it down angrily.*)

IMOGEN (*almost crying*). Don't talk about funerals like that, Freddie! Joan, you speak to Eric. (*She sits in armchair.*)

JOAN (*L. end of sofa*). Why should I? It isn't really a difficult jump—not for a man, anyhow. I'd do it myself with my skirt off. And think what a lovely score it would be off Mrs. Torrent! Think of her watching and watching for Eric to come in by the front door—and all the time he's upstairs, putting her beastly pearls back where he found them! Can you picture it?

IMOGEN (*wistfully*). It would be rather marvellous—after the way she has treated me. You're sure you'll be all right, Eric?

ERIC (*impatiently*). Oh, lord, yes! I think I'll take my shoes off, though, and jump in my socks, in case I slip. (*He puts the pearls in his left-hand trouser-pocket, and goes and sits on sofa. He begins to unlace shoes, remove sock-suspenders, tuck trousers into socks, etc.*)

JOAN (*going out of the window c. and looking L.*). What are all those plants in pots doing round Mrs. Torrent's balcony?

FREDDIE (*goes up to window L.*). The Torrent aspidistras, I fancy, put out for the occasion. Will they cramp your style at all, Eric?

ERIC. I shall have to jump a bit higher, that's all. Of course, I may knock one or two over.

FREDDIE. Well, don't attract the attention of the Bowler Hats, whatever you do!

JOAN (*coming down c. from window*). Bowler Hats! I've got an idea about them. They've simply got to be looking the other way when Eric jumps!

IMOGEN. How are we going to make them do that, dear?

JOAN. I am going to utilize Freddie. (*She goes up and brings FREDDIE down c., from L. window.*)

FREDDIE. Here—I say!—

JOAN. Don't splutter, and come downstairs with me. I am going to give you the key of the Square garden and a large electric torch. You will go into the garden and flash the torch about. That will cause the Bowler Hats to turn suspiciously in your direction.

FREDDIE (*uneasily*). I see!

JOAN. At that moment Eric jumps! Come on!

FREDDIE. But that makes me an accessory after the fact. I suppose you won't mind if I'm disbarred over this?

JOAN. Not a bit.

FREDDIE. And I've thought of something else. What's to prevent Eric jumping straight into the arms of Mrs. Torrent? She may have anticipated all this.

JOAN. I've thought of that too. While you are in the Square garden, with torch, I shall be at the Torrents' front door, asking if I can please speak to Mrs. John Torrent.

FREDDIE. Supposing she won't come?

JOAN. I shall say I am the Duchess of Rye's Secretary: that'll bring her in about one jump. Now, come along! (*Pushing FREDDIE towards the doors R.*)

FREDDIE (*sarcastically*). I must say you think of everything!

JOAN. I have to, my sweet, when I'm with you.

FREDDIE. Henceforward a legal outcast!

(*He exits.*)

JOAN (*running back and kissing ERIC on each cheek over back of sofa*). *Au revoir*, Eric—and good luck! (*She runs and kisses IMOGEN.*) It's going to be all right, darling. (*She runs back to the door.*) Jump when you see the flash, Eric. (*She runs out.*)

(*There is a pause. ERIC, having adjusted his right trouser-leg, pulls up his left trouser-leg above his sock. He turns and sees IMOGEN gazing at him.*)

ERIC. Sorry! (*He turns away and finishes his preparations.*) We must give them a couple of minutes.

(*The front door bangs faintly below. IMOGEN goes to the c. window.*)

IMOGEN. There they are!

(*ERIC comes up to her, a shoe in each hand.*)

Joan's at the Torrents' front door. She's speaking to a footman.

ERIC. Freddie's in the garden. Now then—action!

(*He is about to climb on to the balustrade when IMOGEN suddenly stops him.*)

IMOGEN. Eric darling, you mustn't! I'm frightened! (*She brings him down c.*)

ERIC. Imogen, be brave! What would Willie do?

IMOGEN (*frantically*). Oh, damn Willie! (*She throws her arms round his neck.*) I want you—and I don't want you in pieces!

ERIC. There won't be any pieces!

IMOGEN. Yes, there will. You're going to be killed!

ERIC (*impatiently*). I'm not going to be killed—and I'm not going to let Mrs. Torrent get away with this. (*He kisses her solemnly on the forehead, then goes out of window L., and throws his shoes off L. Then he returns c.*) There! Now I've got to go, to fetch my shoes back.

IMOGEN. I shall die if you aren't back in five minutes! I shall really, darling!

ERIC. It'll be all over in less than three. Let me see—have I got the pearls? (*Brings them out of his pocket, and puts them back.*) Good. Now! (*He goes out by window c., and appears at window L., walking along the balustrade, carefully. Glances down.*) Hallo, there's Freddie flashing! Good-bye! (*He disappears cautiously L.*) IMOGEN runs up to R. of window c.)

IMOGEN (*calling after him*). Darling, mind the plants!

ERIC'S VOICE. I'll try.

IMOGEN. And, darling, please, please, think of the spikes!

ERIC'S VOICE. I am thinking of them! (*She stands watching him, with her hands clasping her cheeks. Suddenly she shudders and covers her eyes. There is a loud crash off L.*)

BLACK OUT and CURTAIN.

SCENE 2

All that is required for this scene is a large window-opening cut in a front cloth and covered inside by a pair of curtains, with a short length of balustrade in front to represent a balcony. There are a few palms in pots. One has fallen over. The music of band can be heard, playing a waltz. During this scene, Scene 3 can be set behind.

The CURTAIN rises on total darkness. The crash at the end of Scene 1 is reproduced, and ERIC is discovered on the balcony. He is on his hands and knees. He listens, and picks himself up cautiously. He peeps through the curtains. He looks over balustrade down into the street. Then he searches for his shoes, and finds them. He is about to enter the curtains when ROSE'S voice is heard saying: "I'm glad you're enjoying yourself, General. Now go and find

another partner." *He hastily edges in between the curtain L. and the inner wall of the room, and disappears.*

ROSE TORRENT *appears through the curtains. She looks about ; then, as if struck by a thought, goes back to the curtains and opens them an inch or two.*

ROSE. Sam !

SAM'S VOICE *(just through the curtain, in a high, comic falsetto).*
Speaking !

ROSE. I'm just coming out here for a breath of fresh air. If anything happens, you'll know where to find me.

SAM'S VOICE. Righto, Sis !

(Left alone, ROSE looks over the balcony, evidently trying to see her own front door. She peers off L. towards IMOGEN'S house, etc., then she notices the pot which has fallen over. She sets it up again. JOHN TORRENT appears through the curtains.)

TORRENT. Hallo, Rose !

ROSE *(slightly startled)*. Hallo, John !

TORRENT. How's your party going ? *(He stands R. of her.)*

ROSE. All according to plan. I wonder who knocked over these plants ?

TORRENT. I expect they blew over : they're top-heavy things. *(Inhaling the air.)* It's nice out here. *(Filling pipe.)* I suppose everybody's arrived by this time.

ROSE. Well—nearly everybody.

TORRENT. What time does this grand cotillion of yours start ?

ROSE. About midnight.

TORRENT. Have you got your presents all ready ?

ROSE. Yes. They're laid out on the billiard-table—most of them. There's a footman watching them. By the way, if you want Eaves for anything, I've just sacked him. He's packing now.

TORRENT. Why, dear ?

ROSE. He was suffering from hallucinations.

TORRENT. What sort ?

ROSE. He was under the impression that this was his party and not mine. Now, about this cotillion : you lead off with the Duchess.

TORRENT. Is she here ?

ROSE. No, but she will be. What time is it ?

TORRENT. A quarter to twelve.

ROSE. She ought to arrive any minute now. After all, she hasn't far to come. *(She looks off L.)*

TORRENT. Hasn't she ?

ROSE. What do you mean ?

TORRENT. Life in London has taught me one thing, Rose ; and that is that sometimes there's nobody lives so far away from you as the people next door.

ROSE. Don't you start moralizing, old gentleman. She'll be here, all right.

TORRENT. If she isn't, you lose your bet. You remember it?

ROSE. I remember it.

TORRENT. And I'm going to hold you to it, my girl. How do you fancy the idea of Bradford, after London?

ROSE (*thoughtfully*). There's a good deal to be said for Bradford—and all that goes with it.

TORRENT. You mean the smoke, and the mills, and the machinery—

ROSE. Yes, I think I do. Machinery has its points, John. It may break your arms and legs if you go too near it, but it doesn't set out deliberately to break your heart, like people do.

TORRENT. What people are you thinking of, Rose?

ROSE (*with sudden passion*). Some of the rottenest snobs that ever lived—the people who've been making use of me for the last twelve months! Making use of me—and all the time snubbing me, and ignoring me, and insulting me to my face!

TORRENT. Well, my girl, there was no need for you to come here, you know. You did ask for it.

(*The music stops.*)

ROSE. Yes, I asked for it: I'm not denying that. But I didn't quite realize what I was asking for. Coo, the cads! Still, I never let on that it was hurting. I kept my chin up and smiled, smiled—like this (*exaggerated smile*)—all the time. And do you know why? Because I knew something they didn't—and that was that I was going to be on top in the end! And to-night's the night! Do you know who's at this party? Practically everybody that's worth while—everybody that's interesting and distinguished and nice in London. I've worked and worked for them, and I've got them at last. And do you know who isn't here? That crowd of cats and cads—people like Charlotte Teignmouth and the poisonous, back-biting lot who've been laughing at me for twelve months—not one of them here! Why? Because they haven't been invited! And when they read the list of guests in the papers to-morrow morning, with the Duchess of Rye at the top—who'll be laughing then? I will! And what will they be doing? They'll be laughing too—on the wrong side of their faces, the dirty tykes!

TORRENT. You're in a queer mood to-night, aren't you?

ROSE. Yes. So would you be if you were a woman—which you're not, thank God!

TORRENT. All right: you know I never interfere. But doesn't a lot depend on this Duchess of yours? Suppose she *doesn't* come?

ROSE. I tell you she will come: I've arranged for that.

TORRENT (*turning her towards him, suspiciously*). Young woman, you've been up to something!

ROSE. You're right. I've fixed things in such a way that the Duchess has her choice between coming here to-night or being the laughing-stock of London to-morrow. (*Confidently.*) She'll come!

TORRENT. What have you been doing ?

(The music begins again—a two-step.)

ROSE. I'll tell you later. I've got to get all this out of my system first. I've been seeing red for the last three months ; and to night I'm going to have my revenge, every last ounce of it—one way or the other.

(A pause.)

TORRENT. Rose, you're the most wonderful woman I've ever known——

ROSE. Thank you ; but you're not going to stop me with that sort of talk.

TORRENT. You can do anything you set your mind to——

ROSE. I know.

TORRENT. Except one thing ; and if you try that you'll make a champion mess of it.

ROSE. If I try what thing ?

TORRENT. If you try to be vindictive—spiteful—petty. You're not built that way. You'll fail !

ROSE. Will I, heck ? You watch me !

(A MAID appears in the curtains.)

MAID. The head footman sent me to find you, madam. I've been up to your room, and everywhere !

ROSE. What's the matter ?

MAID. There's a young lady downstairs, madam, asking for you. She's been there some time, I think.

ROSE. A young lady ? Who ?

MAID. A Miss Buckland, madam.

ROSE. Don't let her come upstairs, whatever you do. I'm coming down.

MAID. Very good, madam. *(She disappears.)*

TORRENT. Who's Miss Buckland ?

ROSE. Joan. She's the Duchess of Rye's Secretary.

TORRENT. That girl ? What on earth does she want ?

ROSE. I'm not quite sure. It's a try-on of some kind.

TORRENT. By the Duchess ?

ROSE. I'm not certain. It may be the white flag : on the other hand, it may be a man trying to do what many a man has tried to do before—pass an awkward job of work on to a woman. You go and see if they've got the ballroom ready for the cotillion : I'm going down to the front door. I'm going to make two things clear to Miss Joan Buckland.

TORRENT. What ?

ROSE. One, that I don't do business with underlings : two, that nobody's going to put anything past Rose Torrent ! Come on !

(She and TORRENT disappear.)

BLACK OUT and CURTAIN.

SCENE 3

SCENE.—*The Morning-room at Mrs. TORRENT'S. Essential furniture as Ground Plan. The doors L. are open, and a stream of guests is seen passing downstairs to the ballroom.*

(*N.B.—Whenever the doors are closed the music is cut off. Same music as at end of Scene 2.*)

ERIC *appears cautiously at R. edge of window curtains. A girl (the BATHING LADY of Act I) enters, and goes up to window. ERIC hurriedly disappears again. GENERAL MAYNARD follows the girl into the room.*

GIRL (*speaking through the noise of crowd and music*). Let's go and sit out on this balcony, General.

GENERAL. Not at my time of life, my dear. (*He leads her down again.*)

GIRL. But it's so cool.

GENERAL. Yes—too cool. Now you come along upstairs with me. I know a nice quiet corner, with no draughts, and where wives never penetrate. That's the spot, etc.

(*By this time they have disappeared out of the room, and no one is in sight. ERIC emerges again, and cautiously closes the doors: the music stops. He goes to the curtains and opens them wide. He then produces the Flamborough Pearls from his trouser-pocket and goes down R. to the bureau.*)

Simultaneously a man in an overcoat and a bowler hat, with a heavy black moustache—a rather obvious detective—emerges from the L. side of the window curtains. He stands watching ERIC, who has now opened the L. drawer of the bureau.)

DETECTIVE (*loudly*). Oy!

ERIC (*snapping drawer*). Oh, my Lord! (*He turns.*) Who are you?

DETECTIVE. You'll soon find that out, my lad. I've been waiting for you for the last 'alf-'our (*coming down*) and now I've copped you, red-'anded!

ERIC. What the devil are you talking about?

DETECTIVE. What have you just taken out of that drawer?

ERIC. I haven't taken anything out. I was putting something back—(*hurriedly*) in!

DETECTIVE. You can tell that to the Judge. Pass them over.

(*ERIC hands over the pearls. The DETECTIVE puts them in his overcoat pocket. From the other pocket he produces a pair of handcuffs.*)

Now these!

ERIC. I say—don't be a damned fool!

DETECTIVE. Will you put out your 'ands, or must I send for reinforcements?

(ERIC walks backward, arguing and resisting, passing below the DETECTIVE till he is down L. The doors L. open and ROSE TORRENT enters, followed by JOAN.)

'Ere we are, madam! I've pinched 'im for you!

(JOAN immediately goes and closes the doors.)

ROSE (R.C.). That's no way to talk, my man. What you mean is that you have arrested him.

DETECTIVE (C., meekly). Sorry!

ROSE. Have you got the pearls back?

DETECTIVE. Yes, madam.

ROSE. Then give them to me. (He does so.) Thank you. Now you go and sit over there till I want you. (She indicates the sofa R.C.)

DETECTIVE. Shall I put the bracelets on him first, madam?

ROSE. Let me think. Yes.

JOAN (running to ERIC from doors, and standing below him). Hit him in the eye, Eric!

ERIC. Wiser not, I think.

(He holds out his hands. The DETECTIVE handcuffs him and goes up to window. JOAN takes ERIC's left arm.)

ROSE (affably). Well, Mr. Richmond? You and I wished each other good night quite half an hour ago, didn't we?

ERIC (cautiously). Yes—I suppose we did.

ROSE. Do you remember what I said to you then?

ERIC (gruffly). I do.

ROSE. And here we are again! Well, well! (To DETECTIVE.) How did he get into this room?

DETECTIVE. From that balcony, madam. I was standing within six feet of 'im for the best part of ten minutes.

ROSE (to ERIC). And how did you manage to get on to my balcony, Mr. Richmond?

ERIC (solemnly). I decline to answer any questions. (He looks at JOAN for approval. She nods.)

ROSE. Oh dear! Well, I must ask someone else, that's all. (To DETECTIVE.) How did he manage to get on to my balcony?

DETECTIVE. From the balcony next door, madam. (Pointing off R.) He jumped.

ROSE (going R.). From the Duchess of Rye's balcony? What a liberty! The Duchess must be told about this at once, Joan. (With a slight imitation of IMOGEN's manner.) Mustn't she? It's only neighbourly—I mean, isn't it?

(She is going R. The doors open and JOHN TORRENT appears.)

TORRENT. Everything's in order for the cotillion, Rose. (He notices ERIC.) I don't think I've shaken hands with you, Mr.

Richmond. (ERIC holds out his manacled hands.) Hallo, what's up?

ROSE. Mr. Richmond here has been caught by this detective with my pearls in his hand, that's all.

TORRENT. The Flamborough Pearls?

ROSE. Yes. They were in your hand, weren't they, Mr. Richmond?

ERIC (helplessly). Yes—but——!

TORRENT. Let's keep this as private as possible. (To DETECTIVE.) You wait outside, my man, on the stairs.

DETECTIVE. But listen——! (He looks appealingly at ROSE, as if about to say something.)

ROSE (pointing L.). On the stairs, till wanted!

(The DETECTIVE gives an injured look and goes out.)

(TORRENT goes up and closes curtains, then comes down c.)

TORRENT. Now, how did your pearls get into his hand, Rose?

ROSE (R.). He'd taken them out of this drawer. (To ERIC.) Hadn't you?

ERIC (L.). Yes. But that was a long time ago—I mean—this time I was—— (JOAN nudges him.)

TORRENT. What were the pearls doing in that drawer at all, Rose?

ROSE. I put them there myself, before dinner.

TORRENT. What's the matter with the safe in your bedroom?

ROSE (smiling). Ah! I was laying a little trap for somebody.

TORRENT (startled). For Mr. Richmond?

ROSE. That's right.

TORRENT. Why?

ROSE. Because I knew he was after them.

TORRENT (incredulously). Because—you——?

ROSE. Oh, he's a well-known gentleman crook. Lots of people have warned me about him: you wouldn't believe the things he's done. He's had to leave the country several times—he's always leaving it. (To ERIC.) Aren't you?

ERIC (helplessly). No—yes—no! But that was to—Joan, you say something!

JOAN (going R. a few paces). Mrs. Torrent, you're making a fearful gaffe, really! Poor old Eric a crook? He couldn't steal a milk-bottle off a doorstep!

TORRENT (interposing quietly). Just a minute, please. Let my wife tell her story first, Mr. Richmond; then we'll have yours. Go on, Rose.

ROSE. So when he rang me up this morning, and begged for a ticket for the party—well, that made me suspicious right off.

TORRENT. He wasn't the only one to beg for a ticket, Rose.

ROSE. No. But listen! When he rang up he said he was

speaking from the Turf Club. He said it twice. And where do you think he was really speaking from? (*Pointing.*) From the other side of that wall—from the Duchess of Rye's!

TORRENT. How did you know that?

ROSE. Never mind. I knew.

TORRENT (*to ERIC*). Were you speaking from the Duchess of Rye's, Mr. Richmond?

ERIC (*after considering*). I decline to answer that question.

ROSE. Were you there too, Joan?

JOAN (*sweetly*). You're not going to put anything over on me, Mrs. Torrent!

ROSE. Then there's nothing else for it—we shall have to call in the Duchess, as a witness. John, sit down at that telephone—

(TORRENT goes below her to telephone R.)

—and ring up Mayfair two-five-o-three, and ask the Duchess of Rye to step round here at once.

TORRENT. The Duchess—step round here? Rose, have you gone daft? Do you think she'd come?

ROSE. I know she'd come. (*She is now L. of TORRENT.*)

TORRENT. Why?

ROSE. If you give her the message I've got for her.

TORRENT. What message?

ROSE. Say we've caught a burglar, who entered our house from hers—and perhaps she might like to say good night to him before he goes to the police station.

(TORRENT sits at telephone and dials reluctantly.)

ERIC (*crossing R., followed by JOAN*). Look here, Mrs. Torrent, we decline to allow the Duchess to be brought into this. Don't we, Joan?

JOAN. Of course we do! Poor darling!

ROSE. Poor nothing! (*To her husband.*) Two-five-o-three.

TORRENT (*hesitating*). But, Rose—you can't—

ROSE. You said you never interfered. Tell whoever answers the telephone that you must speak to Her Grace personally.

TORRENT. Suppose she's gone to bed?

ROSE. Has she gone to bed, Joan?

JOAN (*promptly*). Yes.

ROSE (*calmly*). Then she must get up.

TORRENT. There doesn't seem to be any reply.

ROSE. Hang up, and ring again. (*He does so.*) And when you give her my message, say you're coming over to fetch her yourself.

JOAN. Mrs. Torrent, you're wasting your time, you know. The Duchess simply won't come. Will she, Eric?

ERIC. Of course she won't!

ROSE. Is that someone answering, John?

(TORRENT puts the receiver to his ear.)

TORRENT. Yes. Hallo! Is that—?

ERIC (*to* JOAN). We've got to stop this! (*He advances on TORRENT.*) Put that damned thing down!

ROSE. Go on, John!

JOAN. Go on, Eric!

(ERIC *tries to seize the telephone with his manacled hands.* ROSE *tries to prevent him.* There is a loud crash on the balcony, and the curtains shake.)

ALL. What's that?

(ERIC and JOAN *run up to the window and draw back the curtains.* TORRENT and ROSE *go over L.C.* A clock begins to chime on the mantelpiece. IMOGEN is revealed, with her hands to her face, half fainting.)

JOAN. } Imogen!

ERIC. }

ROSE. } The Duchess!

TORRENT. }

TORRENT. Twelve o'clock. You've won your bet, Rose.

JOAN. Imogen—you! Darling!

ERIC. Catch hold of her: she's half fainting! Bring her in here!

JOAN. Come and sit down, darling.

(*They bring IMOGEN in, and sit her on the couch, with her back to the audience.*)

ROSE (*to* TORRENT). She jumped—in the dark! Those spikes! And it was my doing! Oh, my goodness!

TORRENT. Don't worry, love. There's no harm done. (*He puts ROSE on the chair L.C.*) Are you feeling any the worse for it all, Duchess?

IMOGEN. No—thank you. I'm all right now.

TORRENT (*deliberately*). It's funny your arriving like this. We were just ringing you up—to invite you to come over here. My wife wanted to speak to you. (*To ROSE, almost commandingly.*) Didn't you, Rose?

JOAN (*to* ERIC). Now for the red fire!

(ROSE *risés slowly, and comes c.* IMOGEN *is on the sofa, with JOAN above her.* ERIC *is R. of the sofa; TORRENT is L. of ROSE.* She looks round at each of them, and then speaks to TORRENT.)

ROSE. All right, don't gloat! You've won! You said I couldn't go through with it, and I can't. Let that satisfy you, you big brute! (*She blows her nose loudly, and turns to IMOGEN.*) Duchess, do you know why I put these into the box? (*Indicating the pearls in her hand.*) Of course you do: it was to get you and him into a hole—a hole you couldn't get out of without a bit of

humble pie. I wanted to be able to tell you I'd beaten you. But it was you who beat me. You didn't wait to be sent for—you came on your own—and you risked your neck to do it, without rhyme or reason. You didn't stop to think—you just jumped—all because you loved a man! And I didn't believe you could love anybody! You took the wind out of my sails there, my dear, good and proper! (*She turns to the others.*) All right, you can laugh at me! I deserve it! My big moment—every card in my hand—and all I can do is cry—cry!—just because she—oh, what a turn she gave me! Blimey, duckie, what did you want to go and do a thing like that for? What did it feel like? Could I have done it? No! Can I kiss you? Yes! (*She does so.*) Now go and kiss him!

(*She raises IMOGEN, and pushes her towards ERIC, on the hearthrug. He solemnly passes his manacled hands over her head, and kisses her.*)

TORRENT. But will somebody please tell me——

(*There is a crash off R.; a plant in a pot falls over on to the balcony, and FREDDIE falls into view, on his hands and knees.*)

ERIC. }
JOAN. } Hallo!
TORRENT. }

FREDDIE (*having dusted his knees, etc.*). Good evening, folks! Forgive me for coming by air! Imogen, I've brought your shoes.

(*IMOGEN takes the shoes, and sits on chair at bureau to put them on.*)

JOAN (*running to him*). Freddie, my lamb! Did you—too?

FREDDIE (*coming down c.*). Yes, I also jumped. I knew I should hate it—and how right I was!

JOAN (*relieved to find he is not hurt*). But why did you risk your life, you big sap?

FREDDIE. I got back to that room just in time to see Her Grace the Duchess of Rye, with her skirt round her neck, taking a flying leap from off the end of the balcony! As her legal adviser, I felt bound to follow her—and here I am!

TORRENT. Before I go quite daft—how did all this start? What was the box we hear so much about? And——

ROSE. You'll hear the whole story before you go to sleep to-night, my lad—and you don't go to sleep till you've heard it! Now buzz off to the ballroom.

(*TORRENT opens doors: the opening music of the cotillion is heard. A couple appear coming downstairs. They turn L., and disappear.*)

Oh, my goodness! There's that cotillion started! There'll be a whole swarm past this door in a minute. Yes, there they go!

(Other couples begin to pass the door—LADY MAYNARD and partner, etc.)

(To IMOGEN.) They mustn't see you, dearie, whatever happens. John, shut those doors.

(TORRENT does so: the music stops.)

(To IMOGEN.) You'll stay there with Mr. Richmond. When everybody's safely in the ballroom I'll send somebody up here to take you down by a side stair; then you can slip home, and pop straight into bed! (She goes L. to the door.)

IMOGEN. Rose dear— (She rises, and comes L.C.) Can't I stay for your cotillion?

ROSE. Say that again!

IMOGEN. Can't I stay, please?

ROSE (breathlessly). You mean it? You'd like to?

IMOGEN. I'd love to.

ROSE (majestically). John, don't stand there looking soft: give the Duchess your arm!

(TORRENT throws open the doors, then comes back for IMOGEN.)

(To TORRENT.) All right—we both win, and I'm coming to Bradford!

(Louder music. At the door GENERAL MAYNARD is passing with a partner. He stops and greets IMOGEN, making way for her to go first with TORRENT.)

GENERAL. No idea you were to be here, Duchess.

IMOGEN. Neither had I, General! (These words are merely spoken on the stairs as they disappear, and need not be heard.)

ROSE (to FREDDIE and JOAN). Go on, you two. We may as well make a job of it.

JOAN. Oh, thank you, Mrs. Torrent.

ROSE. I dare say we can find a couple of presents for you.

FREDDIE. I was always pro-Torrent!

(Exit with JOAN.)

ROSE (to ERIC, who is standing on hearthrug). Oh, you're still there, are you? Cheer up—I'll find someone for you.

(By this time the landing outside is clear and music has died away.)

ERIC (R., exhibiting his handcuffs). Yes—but I say—look here!

ROSE. Oh, my gracious! Aren't those off yet? You poor thing! (Calling off L., impatiently.) Here, you!

(DETECTIVE appears from the staircase.)

DETECTIVE. Hallo!

ROSE. Sam, for goodness' sake come out from behind that silly little moustache, and unlock these things!

(The DETECTIVE dashes his hat on the ground, pulls off his nose and moustache, revealing SAM.)

SAM. Oh, Sis, have a heart! Don't go and spoil *everything*!

ERIC (*shouting*). Where's the key, you fool!

SAM (*shouting*). I've lost it! (*Loud music again.*)

(*They run to him, feeling in his pockets, etc., all talking excitedly.*)

CURTAIN.

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY PLOT

ACT I

On Stage.

3 couches or camp bedsteads on verandah, with big umbrellas open over them. Orange mattress on couch c.
2 round tables.
4 small chairs.
2 long basket chairs.
"Sketch" and "Tatler" on table L.
Box of matches on each table.

Off Stage.

Mattress, "La Vie Parisienne," towel—for EAVES.
Binoculars, towel—for GENERAL.
Mattress, moustache, towel—for SAM.
Cigarette, towel—for FREDDIE.
3 cushions, towel—for JOAN.
Wrist-watch, cushion—for ERIC.
Workbag—for LADY MAYNARD.
Parasol, bag with *mille* notes—for IMOGEN.
Camera—for PHOTOGRAPHER.
Mattress—for CHEPSTOW (same as EAVES).
Towel—for ROSE.

ACT II

On Stage.

Carpet on floor.
Rug by fireplace.
Picture down R.
Portrait above fireplace.
Writing-table—blotter, papers, inkstand with green quill pen, writing-paper case with green writing-paper and envelopes, green telephone, ashtray, scissors in sheath, roses in bowl, 2 pencils in upstage top drawer.
Half-table L.C.—small vase, green cigarette-box (filled), ashtray, box of matches.
Half-table R.C.—small vase, 2 books, 2 ashtrays, bill, box of matches.
Tapestry armchair.
Mantelpiece—large clock, 2 Chinese vases. Club fender round it.
Tapestry stool.
Large folding table—7 paper-pads set round, 4 pencils set on L. side, 1 ashtray, 2 boxes of matches, 7 pieces of green blotting-paper, silver inkstand, blue and red quill pens.
5 shield-back chairs set round table.
2 shield-back armchairs each end of table.
Green armchair at bureau down R.
Low seat on front of fire.
All doors shut at opening.
All windows open.

Off Stage.

Filing basket—12 agenda papers, minute book, bills on clip, red engagement book—for JOAN.
Cheque—for GENERAL.
Cheque in blue envelope—for EAVES.
Spectacles—for FOOTMAN.

ACT III

SCENE 1

The Scene is the same except for alterations described in the text.

Off Stage.

Shell box wrapped in tissue-paper and tied with red tape. At bottom a piece of black velvet, then a pearl necklace, then another piece of black velvet, then 3 green envelopes and 3 green letters. Box locked.

Loud door-slam.

Gramophone—2 small door-slams, hooter, coco-nuts, flower-pot crash. Box of matches, wet cloth, lycopodium powder, bottle of methylated, stick to take match.

All doors shut at opening.

Windows open, except extreme R. window, which is half closed.

SCENE 2

Frame cloth with window (at window curtains).

On balustrade: 3 palms at each side, 2 broken on L., 1 lying down on L. 3 bits of broken pot on ground.

Crash from end of previous scene wanted at once for opening.

SCENE 3

On Stage.

Carpet.

Rug, doubled from Act II.

Bureau—blue writing-paper, black telephone, coloured pens, silver inkstand from Act II, ashtray, papers and letters, 2 candlesticks with candles, clock.

Chair at bureau.

Screen in front of fireplace.

Chaise-longue—cushion.

Light chair L.C.

Settee at head of stairs off L.

Curtains closed at opening.

Doors open.

Off Stage.

2 palms near window.

Crash.

Handcuffs.

BLUE SEA BACKGROUND

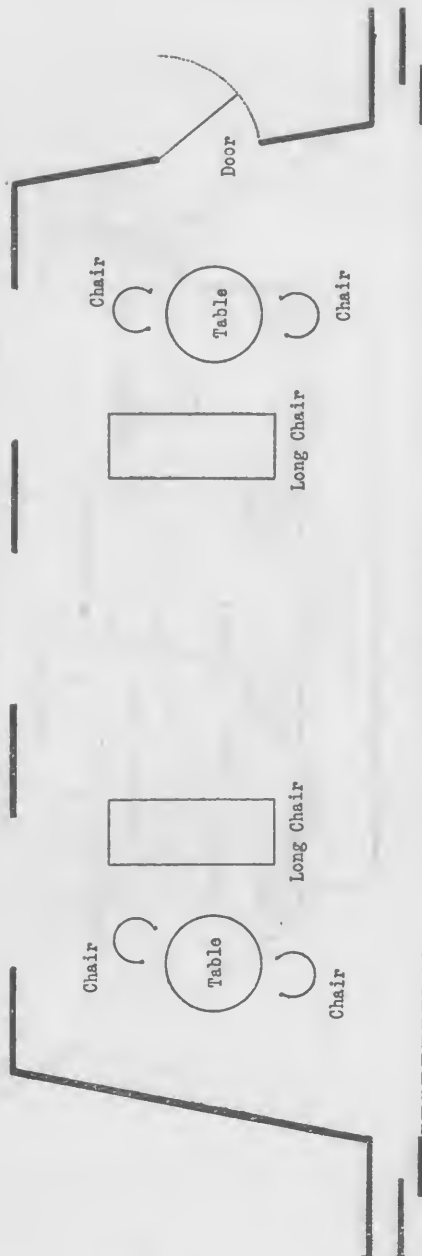
RAIL

Couch

Couch

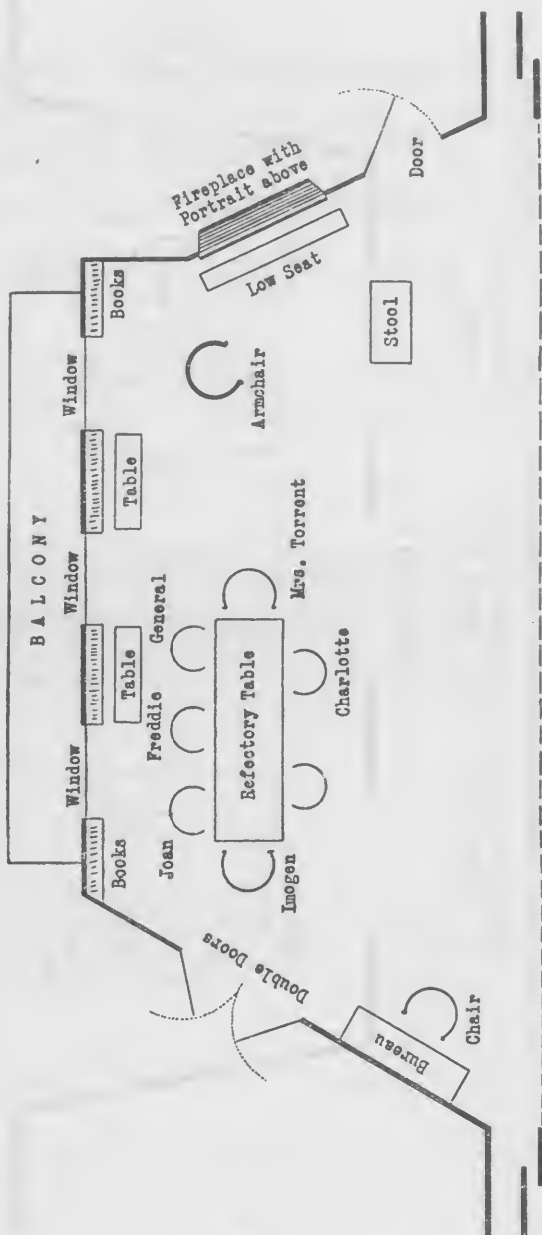
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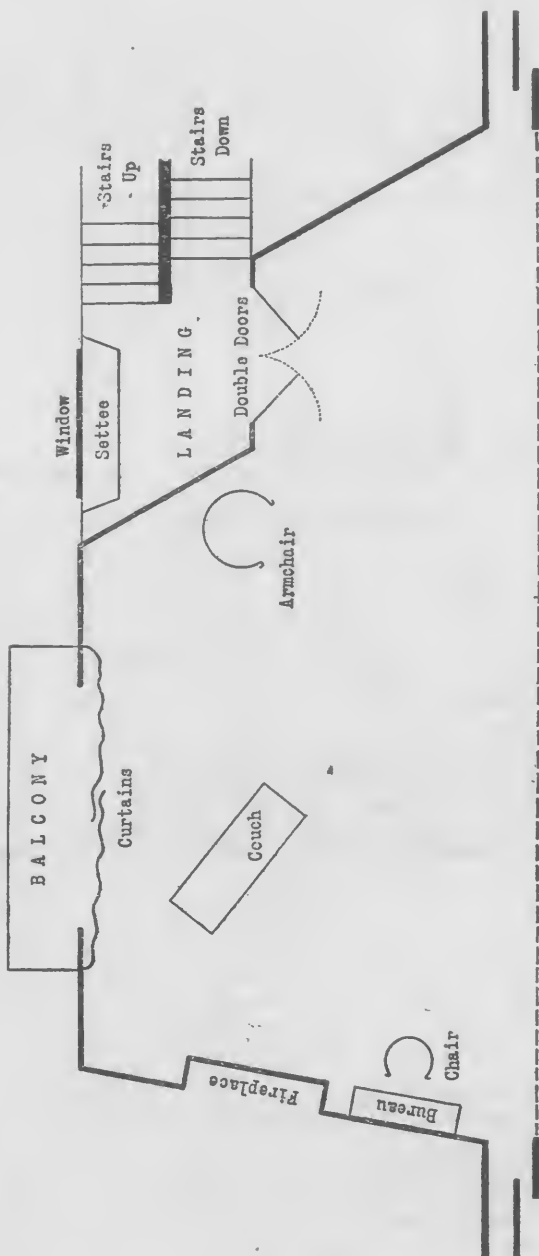


FOOTLIGHTS
ACT I

TREE-TOP BACKCLOTH



TREE-TOP BACKCLOTH



FOOTLIGHTS
ACT III, SCENE 3

LIGHTING PLOT

ACT I

4 straw floods on backcloth.

Float.—Amber—white—pink, FULL.

No. 1 Batten.—Amber—white—pink, FULL.

No. 4 Batten (on backcloth).—1 circuit (white), 1 circuit (17 blue).

ACT II

6 straw floods on backcloth.

Fire L.

2 brackets L.

2 brackets R.

1 standard lamp up R.

Length at door L.

Straw flood at door R.

Float.—Amber—white—pink, FULL.

No. 1 Batten.—Amber—white—pink, FULL.

No. 4 Batten (on backcloth).—1 circuit (white), 1 circuit (17 blue).

ACT III

SCENE 1

3 (17 blue) floods on backcloth.

3 (double steel-blue) floods on backcloth.

Fire L.

2 brackets L.

2 brackets R.

1 standard lamp up R.

Steel-blue flood at door R.

Motor effect plugged up ready and tested, off L.

Motor horn plugged up ready and tested, off L.

Bentley motor effect plugged up ready and tested.

Float.—Amber (FULL) white (HALF) pink (FULL).

No. 1 Batten.—Amber (FULL) white (HALF) pink (FULL).

No. 4 Batten (on backcloth).—1 circuit (steel-blue), FULL; 1 circuit (17 blue), FULL.

BLACK OUT AT CUE.

SCENE 2

2 steel-blue spots or perches concentrated on balcony.

No. 3 Batten.—Quarter steel-blue for working light.

BLACK OUT AT CUE.

SCENE 3

1 bracket in passage up L.

1 bracket on up stage on up-and-down flat L.

1 bracket R.

2 17-blue floods on backcloth.

2 steel-blue floods on backcloth.

2 amber floods L. on to staircase.

Float.—As Act III, Scene 1.

No. 1 Batten.—As Act III, Scene 1.

No. 4 Batten.—As Act III, Scene 1.

Continued from second page of cover.

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